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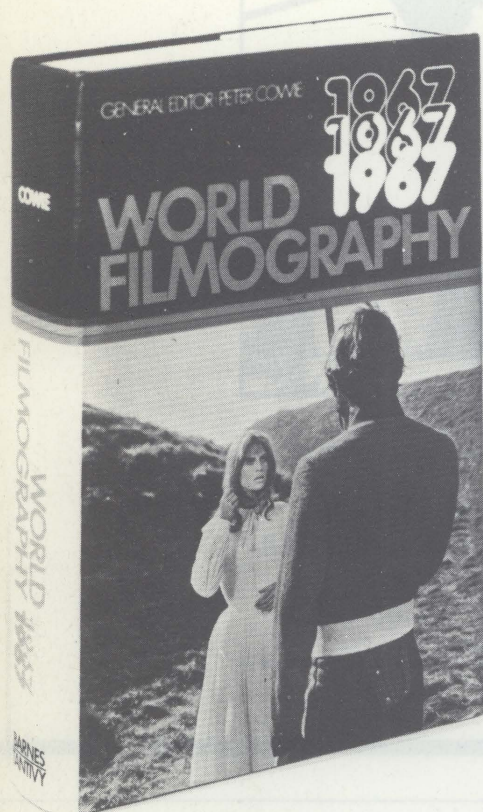
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SUMMER 1977

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On the cover: Bruno Ganz in
Wim Wenders' 'Der Amerikanische
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SIGHT AND SOUND is an independent critical magazine sponsored and published by the British Film Institute. It is not an organ for the expression of official British Film Institute policy: signed articles represent the views of their authors.

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David Thomson

My mother had not been to the cinema for years before she died. 'No need now,' she said, and nodded at a colour television as solid and unfriendly as a deep-freeze. But I doubt if she watched many movies on it, apart from a few continental films that she had heard talked about. 'It's not the same,' I hear her saying, to explain the inadequate impact of miniature movies. She was a moderate, restful woman, but she expected movies to overwhelm her. Her local cinema had become a dangerous place—'sordid' was a word she often used when talking about cinema. The last movie she saw was *The Romantic Englishwoman*, attracted by the title, perhaps, and then upset to find it was ironic and misleading. What warned her away from cinemas was that perverse cleverness or spite in films.

It hurt her because she had liked the cinema once. In the 30s and 40s, especially, she was a regular, unextreme filmgoer, and she treated my childish fascination with movies without dismay or correction. Often she took me herself, or talked to me about the pictures when I went on my own and waited outside seeking to be taken in by a strange 'aunt' if the film had an A certificate. She was not a reckless parent, but she saw no reason in 1950 to be disturbed by that means of entry.

*'It is a sad fate: how complex
How difficult and useless it is to live
And to become the property of the professor
And to give birth to new critics'*

—ALEXANDER BLOK

I remember when it was a Cinema

The Paramount, Tottenham Court Road



Today, in suburban London, who would dare to let a child solicit in the crestfallen entrance of a cinema, even if there remained a category of film for which a child required an adult in tow? There are few cheerful congregations now in the cinema, but uneasy individuals with a dozen seats to themselves. Sometimes they are pensioners keeping warm, sometimes they rant or mutter to themselves about invisible grievances, heedless of the film. Many of them seem disconsolate at the public neglect of the form: sumptuous advertisements are gross and insulting in deserted cinemas. The echoing blandishments humiliate us. Some viewers substantiate fears that the cinema is a waste ground of furtive sexual incidents. We smile at the idea of the 'dirty mac trade', but so many public cinemas are now seedy and apologetic, as if fit for that nondescript who sits in baleful awe of the fantastic screen and may sometimes, in despair or vengeance, carry its melodramatic spasms over into life. In too many cinemas, there is little community, confidence or energy; the practice and the spirit seem listless and dowdy. The cinema is no longer of the people.

I must not suggest that no one any longer enjoys himself in the cinema—though my argument is aimed at the reasons why the large-scale and possibly primitive pleasure common in the 30s and 40s has been eclipsed. I have sat in full cinemas, in England and America, and felt the entranced alarm at *Taxi Driver* following its own narrow logic. In America, I have noticed crowds at *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Network* behaving as if they were at a football match, roaring encouragement and abuse at phantom characters doomed to replay the fixed game day after day. Those are instances of 'enjoyment' in that someone has been 'held' or 'carried away' by a movie. But they revolve around distress, anguish or anger. The complete experience in the cinema now is seldom elevating, cheerful or romantic. If the cinema is occasionally a church again, for all of us, we gather in woe and dread for our wretched times, and the 'enjoyment' can be lacerating.

But in London we are well catered for. Anyone interested in 'film' has the National Film Theatre's two cinemas, the Essential, the Phoenix, the Screen on the Green, two Electrics, the Gate, the Other, not to mention such durables as the three Academies, the Paris Pullman and the Curzon. Following that circuit one can see a rich assortment of movies, at reasonable cost, in good company, and often with an audience able to talk about the film afterwards—strictly no-necking houses. The improved status of film, the wider knowledge of its history and the more informed debate about its art are in a state of symbiosis with those earnest cinemas. Sometimes the air is heavy and still with symbiosis. It has replaced the perfumed disinfectant that once appeased health inspectors.

There are losses, though. I can recall, in the late 50s and early 60s, the rapture of buying the new *What's On* to search through the suburban cinemas for rare goodies that might be on for three days here, or a Sunday there. In those happy times when one could rely on and afford the tube, it was possible



Faces of the audience. Children at Walham Green, London; art-house audience at Cinema 16, New York

to fill in so many empty places in one's lists—lists compiled personally in the BFI library, when the place was nearly empty and there were no handy reference books. Those forays included *Les Amants* at the Classic, Stockwell—premises where love is now less rarefied; *The Killing* at the Granada, Thornton Heath, content today with Bingo's big bundles; *The Trouble with Harry* at the Prince of Wales, Harrow Road; my first viewing of *Rebecca* at the Ionic, Golders Green—the journey there becoming part of the trip to Manderley; *Thunder Bay* vivid in the dejected Grand at Camberwell; *Bitter Victory* at the Granada, Crystal Palace; *The Far Country*—far, indeed, it seemed then—at the Essoldo, Hackney.

Few of those sites now beckon pilgrimages; yet the most atmospheric of cinemas from that era still stands, and its transformation is instructive. Around 1960, the Imperial in Portobello Road was a ghetto cinema. Its largely West Indian audience had two or three programmes a week of American double-bills from the 40s and 50s. Westerns and war pictures prevailed in total, stand-up-and-shoot participation from the customers. I remember stamping feet on the bare floor, surging with every chase and charge, without a hint of irony. But occasionally this dingy, louche and threatening house went astray and found a film in which there was more talking than shooting: Fritz Lang's *Scarlet Street* I tracked down there, and it seemed a title coined for the place, even if the patrons yawned at Joan Bennett's sleepy moll. So long as the movie was *Verboten!* or *Attack!* the locals and I could share the enjoyment. But *Scarlet Street* turned on a quiet, bourgeois man caught in a trap, and it caused fidgeting. There were a few other fixed stares, and I realised that they were faces familiar from the NFT, the ardent undeterred among the casual.

Today, in the same house, the pattern is nearly reversed. With imperialism out of favour, a new management has gone back

to an earlier name, the Electric, and turned it into an enterprising, shabby art-house ranging far and wide for its material and, in the last year, introducing *F for Fake* and *Der Verlorene* as well as surveying Dreyer, German expressionism, Ophüls, von Stroheim and several of the American standards that kept the old Imperial happy and noisy. *They Live By Night* still seems extra urgent there, but it is watched in respectful silence. The new audience is essentially white, aware and learned, and it is the West Indians who venture in shyly. The Electric is a branch of the academic film establishment, and no longer quite a cinema. It is an art-house or a film theatre, confident of its admirable, informed audience.

I am not complaining. If London lacked an Electric, or if its adventurous programmes ever faltered, that would be the moment for protest. But I understand the clinging on to that old, exciting name 'Electric' and the deliberate, if not mannered, retention of the cinema's original appearance, and I wonder if they clash with the Electric's broadsheet, sent to members and available at other like-minded establishments. The Imperial warned of coming attractions with posters and raddled trailers, but the Electric gives introductions and critical comments on its films. It even quotes me sometimes, and assumes that its audiences are respectful of opinions exchanged in film academia. Surely the attempt to combine two approaches to watching films admits that we have lost something? The cinema is no longer a public concern, but a specialist pursuit called film. The Electric manages the balancing act very well, but it cannot be long before ventures that 'preserve' the atmosphere of old cinema become studied, camp or grotesque. How long before a Kinematograph opens in that scorched earth ring round Piccadilly Circus, with porn shot in soot-and-whitewash and a naked lady performing on the upright?

Will we never be satisfied? The last fifteen years have witnessed a revolution in attitudes to movies that most of us would have voted for fifteen years ago if we had seen an outline plan. Nor do I want this to be read as a lament for lost times. Films will always be made according to the impulses, opportunities and exigencies of their times. Creative people and moneyed interests dictate that, not critical attitudes. What I want to indicate is the high-minded kidnapping of 'cinema' movies as fodder for the theorising of 'film' studies. In Britain, especially, those who make and those who talk about films seldom meet. The indulged hermetics of theoretical jargon do overlook enjoyment, sensation and the climate of merchandised entertainment that was essential to most of the films analysed in *Screen* and similarly dedicated journals. A film made deliberately as a contribution towards semiology responds to that sort of dissection. *Young Mr. Lincoln* and *North by Northwest* are the richer for some people because of it, but their larger nature is distorted by an approach that leaves out of account the industrial system, the values of the stars involved and the audience reactions to the patterns of stereotypes. To this day, nearly all the films we see are made in the desperate hope of entertaining us, and responsible film

studies should be wary of an approach that is not animated by the films and a tone alien to the popular response a film is looking for. My fear is that the subject is sometimes being led away so that analyses read like accounts of films scrutinised only on a movieola in a cramped cell.

Now, of course, the subject is examined in schools and universities. That process is much more developed in America than in Britain. But if a six-figure number of students is watching films at American college-level, it is Britain which has pioneered the teaching of film in secondary schools. For several years, it has been possible to get an 'O' level in Film, and it cannot be long before the subject reaches into primary schools. Indeed, if it continues to be so difficult to teach our children to read and write, may we not excuse that gap by earnestly embarking on a campaign of visual literacy—signs and meaning for the six-year-old?

That is the very possibility I invoked in every 'Art of Film' introduction I taught in five years. The validity of the point survived repetition: American kids at college age have probably been exposed to 20,000 hours of moving imagery—most of it on TV, of course. But TV is only a shift in the direction of marketed imagery. Around 1950–60—we might argue—the variety and quantity of imagery available became such that there was no time for us to go out to the cinemas. We must stay at home and have the imagery pumped to us, along with every other staple service. In that decade, moving pictures became a necessity and not an entertainment. They were taken for granted, and they lost size, glamour and novelty. But the young, whose understanding or misunderstanding of the world has been so influenced by imagery, arrive at college without instruction in how to deal with their 20,000 hours' experience. Imagine how much more temperate, kind and sensitive the world might be if they had spent that time reading and writing. Or would it? Is that the wishful thinking of a renegade, harking back to an irretrievably abandoned culture? Or someone so shaped by movies and their power of fantasy that present achievement never matches the appeal of the unattainable?

The majority of film students are people coming to the subject for the first time. It is tactically useful and proper to ask them to recognise the unconsidered experience of film they have had. The statistics take them aback, but they are astonished to hear how many acts of killing they will have seen in that time, and quite ready to speculate on what the fusillade of fictional deaths may have done to their ideas of mortality and pain. With that fresh consciousness alerted, one can begin to show students some of the ways film works as a story-telling medium or as a more profound appeal to the imagination. It has been a pleasant job for many others of my generation, people who once thought of making films and now settle into middle age with the comfort of being able to watch and discuss them with an appreciative audience.

Even in America there remain universities unconvinced about the place of film in their curricula. In Britain, of course, it is only the few that do offer it and, a little

uncomfortably, ponder making it a programme or fitting it into other disciplines as a modern adjunct—film and society, anyone? Most film teachers still have to defend their 'seriousness' to academic deans and colleagues in older subjects. Then you trot out the statistics about hours of imagery, educating the institution before you can get at the kids. Some faculty know that some kids are looking for an easy course—sitting in the cinema once a week and handing in a few flat critiques. In response, many film courses become ferociously demanding, and here one must admit a non-academic pressure creeping in.

I worked too hard as a film teacher. It unsettled other teachers, left me distraught, but—I reasoned—it gave some of the kids a love of the cinema, the beginnings of an obsession. That is the pressure, and I am not the only teacher to be driven by it. When you start to teach film, you feel the surrounding hostility of a cautious institution and of kids who have taken the subject for granted. To establish the subject and yourself, you preach film, urging it upon people as a neglected message, overlooked at our peril. The spearhead of this evangelism must be the teacher's faith, and the implication that his enthusiasm or obsession can be communicated or 'caught'. I have known classes where the teacher's mood and the talents of the students conspired with shattering results. In a small college, film can monopolise like a fashionable drug. Then the class huddles in the way of disciples. It turns a room into its chapel where there is always dark and someone watching a movie. Students compete to see how many times they can view the films on the course. They put the film on a movieola that the teacher has squeezed out of his budget and run it back and forth, scrutinising dissolves and patterns of composition. Some of them send off for prospectuses for film schools and begin to make their own movies. In America they hope to be directors; in Britain they may want to teach film. But the class turns its back on the rest of the school, often on other courses, and revels in the intensity of salvation.

I am not sure how guilty to feel on this score. Such a pitch of fervour—with 'Cinema Reigns' on the film-room door—can lead to difficult talks with department chairmen: 'We're here to give a balanced, liberal education.'—'The most valuable thing you can show the young is the nature of a compelling interest.'

But you cannot teach or implant a compelling interest—even if you can keep it in the air for a semester. It has to arise within a person, of his own volition, and it will always be his private property. Perhaps it is frustrated creativity in teachers, and their wistful regret that they might have been directors, that promotes this level of involvement in a film class—sometimes positive and useful, but sometimes nearly hysterical, with the class a besieged stronghold overawing the rest of the college, still indifferent and unpossessed. It is not the task of a film teacher to send students out into the world desperate to be directors. That must be the kids' responsibility—otherwise the teacher has to live with their consequent disappointment, for to become a movie director is still one of the most inaccessible jobs and destructive of quests.

Not many courses, I hope, become impacted with their own zeal—though it is a heady experience and one that I would not have missed. By far the majority of film students will do only an occasional course in which they acquire some technical vocabulary, an outline of cinema's history and a new respect for what goes on in the making of a film and for what happens to them when they are watching it. It is people like this who go to the Electric and its brothers all over the world. Probably the principal discovery they make is that movies should be thought of as works by directors—not simply spectacular or sentimental stories starring this actor and that actress. Nothing illustrates the new respectability of films as well as the process that has lifted them from the unprincipled grip of tycoons and stars and given them instead to directors. These men quickly learned to give a long and thoughtful answer when interviewers asked them long, thoughtful questions—or, like Hitchcock, sat smug and impassive, gathering more wit and wisdom with churlish denials of depth that, one day perhaps, may reveal a shallow, coarse man.

Authorship is the means to dignity, and there is no arguing but that, as the enormous trade in film-going declined, so first directors and then critics and teachers became increasingly authoritative and pretentious. Sooner or later, a film teacher offers directors. If he is traditional, they will be declaratory innovators like Bergman, Fellini, Godard or Welles. More testing are studies of, say, Fritz Lang, Nicholas Ray or Vincente Minnelli, where evident personality is fighting a battle with the system. And, curiously, all those directors gave up regular work as the system crumbled and they became the subjects of acclaiming books and articles. The teacher working from such brimming material as *Bigger than Life* or *The Cobweb* naturally credits his interpretation of the film to the director's coherent approach. And in such cases there is a wealth of stylistic felicity to support the argument, as well as a thorough, happy and necessary ignorance of what compromises occurred in the making of those films. Authorship is not simply respect for cinema, hero-worship of attractive men in the tough business of direction; not simply the old notion that good work is derived from one author, fashioning and choosing the form of that work. It is also a very convenient way to teach. But it cuts across the first response the average student feels.

One of the most frequent problems I faced on introductory courses was the student disturbed at having to adjust his or her relationship to the medium. Very often this came from the less mature student, but if one begins to grade reactions on that basis it dilutes any hope that the cinema is a form for all people. Furthermore, the problem was a subtle one. It was that the revelation of part of the nature and potential of the medium had confused their enjoyment of it. Once upon a time, they realised, they had allowed movies to wash over them. It was unalloyed entertainment in which they knew they could relax. I had disturbed that, and they bore no resentment. On the contrary, they felt ashamed of how passive they had once been. Dutifully, they watched now for the measures and devices that I had

warned them of in advance as typical of Sternberg, Renoir or Kazan. This was strenuous, and they quickly fell into admiration for the density of the medium and the stamina of anyone trying to control and shape it. But they lost the picture. Sometimes, literally, they could not follow the story for concentrating on how film functioned. But, worse than that, they lost touch with the characters. They did not feel for them as much, or at all. They no longer cried or felt good in the cinema; they took notes, instead.

Their distress spilled out without recrimination, and I told them that it would pass. This was a transitional stage; it would soon give way to an added enjoyment in which their original vicarious participation in films was reinforced by a deeper awareness of the film itself as an artful machine—so I told them, and they went away more earnest than ever. Did it work for them, I wonder now, or are there distinct ways of watching films, the differences hidden by the darkness that turns preoccupied individuals into a cinema crowd?

I am not thinking principally of situations in which different people come away from a film and discover two films once they talk about it—though that can put friendships to a sore test. It may be only the argument as to whether Joan Fontaine in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* is a lovelorn victim of the heartless Louis Jourdan, or a self-destructive fantasist who has to have some impossible love to sustain her—and picks upon this chilly cad. The choice there is real, but the debate enriches the film, for both answers are contained within it. Settling for one or the other may show a viewer's temperament, but the most flexible response is to see both working; I am sure Ophüls was at least as embracing as that.

But for some twenty years now, the cinema has been subjected to a different sort of interpretation: intense, intellectual and committed—sometimes desperate, convoluted and doctrinaire. Invariably cut off from experience of how they were made, this approach has forced meaning into films until they become the property of critics and theorists. Once we taught Renoir, Hawks and Godard; now we feel we should offer Bazin, Metz and Burch. The motives are very understandable. Young critics, in France particularly, were eager to find heroes and causes—cinema, after all, is an heroic form. They were also, if unconsciously, elevating a job they wanted for themselves. The *politique des auteurs* defines a way of directing never possible in Hollywood, but actually achieved when Truffaut, Godard and the others inherited the kingdom. The Americans they admired were often perplexed by the rapturous acclaim. There are comic interviews in *Cahiers du Cinéma* with Americans nervously admitting to not grasping fulsome interpretations. Hitchcock the tease was in his element and spoke with several tongues. More sincere men—Ray and Losey, for instance—may have been fatally undermined by reading their own reviews and looking to make films worthy of them.

Although *Cahiers* loved American movies, its writers had been brought up in a tradition that respected art and intellect, and it was not long before their own movies

veered back to that faith. Truffaut and Chabrol cling on to the chance of popular cinema, but Godard, Rohmer and Rivette have moved towards the art-house, shabby or sophisticated, and the campus film group. Popular cinema was stranded in the 1960s as conviction, cash and talent drained away from Hollywood. In the 70s, a little of all those things has returned, but cinema is now only intermittent where once it was constant. Still, in America, the new generation of directors—Coppola, Scorsese, Rafelson, Bogdanovich, Spielberg—face the commercial realities of huge budgets and audiences. Bogdanovich was an auteur disciple, interviewing heroes to get into the spirit of the business; Scorsese was student and teacher. But their best works are still aimed at everyone, with a flourish no other

art is capable of. Only in America, and only fleetingly there, does the total audience remain a realistic target. And there, it is natural to eat popcorn with a quality movie.

The age of the director is headed logically for underground or experimental film. I guess that the younger directors will settle sooner or later for making more introspective films for smaller audiences who scorn popcorn. The risk in going for a *Jaws* or a *Godfather* is so great that one disaster can wipe out several hits. The liberated director must now live with those worries and calculations, whereas a Minnelli or an Anthony Mann was often spared them by the despised figure of the producer, a friendless punchbag of fretfulness and ulcers. Bogdanovich seems weary of seeking popular success, perhaps aware that as he



Front of House: 'Sorrows of Satan' at the Tower cinema, Hull; 'Witchcraft Through the Ages' at the Times cinema, Baker Street, London



grew in authority his films became more remote. Scorsese apparently suffers physically and emotionally in struggles with money men, even if he can endure the piercing fears of his own films. George Lucas has talked of opting soon for private work, and one wonders how long the intelligence and originality of a Rafelson can find commercial expression. He may have to stay as hungry as Monte Hellman. Films could be like novels in the 1920s—popular but not universal. The universities might even become a production base, especially with the sort of assistance from TV that has permitted the resurgence in German cinema.

Then films could be confined to film theatres, and the audiences would know their directors and appreciate the form. It fills me with foreboding to think of film settling into the isolated gulch of art made by artists for blessed fellows, saved or trapped in the same gulch and filling its gloom with clouds of complacent insight. The problem my students felt is still vital to the possibility of cinema. My answer to them was dishonest in that it overlooked a problem I had had with films for years. The person obsessed with movies may be embarrassed if he takes anyone to the cinema—he may not even like to go with other people. But many viewers are still capable of deep emotional experiences in front of films, whereas the obsessive needs light and movement like an addict needing a drug. No student ever grasped the weakness of my approach, but I see it. I identify with films, with their directors, with the cinema itself. But it is possible for viewers to feel for and through the people represented in films. I have sometimes marvelled at the way companions were reduced to tears by films, and they were distressed that I could

only see how well Borzage or Stahl had managed it. The critical and academic breakthrough of the last two decades has done fine work of analysis and appreciation—just as it has produced much that is obscure, humourless and special pleading. But it scarcely bothers with the emotional and sensational charge of the films it discusses, and has largely failed to tackle the analysis of performance and personality on the screen, the agency through which so much of the human effect is achieved. We do go to the movies to see people—as well as authors. In a word—emotion, said Samuel Fuller, zeroing in on film in *Pierrot le Fou*; semiotics and every other dogma has coldly endorsed that rawness but attended to the drier pleasures of motion, pattern and sign. The critic who tolerates his companion's tears sometimes goes away to write that a film is 'unbearably moving'. But no one can write that who has been unbearably moved.

The *auteur* theory is still the most current and influential, for it is safe, recognisable and manageable, whereas more recent emphases—semiotics, psychoanalysis, Marxism, feminism and structuralism—are often risky, blurred and unwieldy. All of them, I think, use films for some higher or other purpose; whereas most kids who sign on for a film course actually want to learn more about movies. But the proliferation of theories does reflect reservations about *auteurism*. In part, this allows film to be seen as an expression of popular ideology or signs and meaning. But it also makes the teacher an *auteur*, sometimes an unintelligible, tyrant *auteur* who sees so much in a movie that the kids he lectures are put off looking or are ushered into the 'higher' cause. No one can say that the method is not creative, but it can also be overweening and disproportionate.

A good deal of film criticism now rivals the most arcane and useless, as well as the most gripping and suggestive, literary criticism. Again, it is often a beneficial change, but always in danger of taking sensational works more ponderously than their makers intended. It may be the most intriguing part of film's nature that all movies, by virtue of cinema's mechanism, are melodramatic, romantic, tricky and trashy. In English Literature, discrimination can tell Jane Austen from Barbara Cartland, and put Cartland to one side. But in film studies, the serious and the meretricious are problematically alike: *Un Chien Andalou* and *Humoresque*, for instance, both use *Tristan and Isolde* to glory in mad and impossible love. The Buñuel is respectable, and the Negulesco is smiled at. But perhaps they have to be compared, and both depend on darkness and the aroused spectator more than they need articulate explanation.

One conclusion of this soul-searching is that cinema may well encourage and exploit a capacity for separating impact from mechanism—a sort of deviousness that we are not brought up to admire even if we suffer from it. The teaching of film will go on, and it threatens to overwhelm the cinema, especially in Britain. In many ways, the films made will be 'better', more daring, more difficult, more personal. But, in my mother's terms, they will be more sordid. How many films have you seen recently that were not about wilfully exaggerated human nastiness? Love was once a staple of cinema—often trite and superficial, but sometimes touching and lyrical. When did you last see a film in which you believed people were in love, and cared?

There are answers to both questions, of course, but not too many. In recent years I can point to a handful of films that keep faith with the scope of popular cinema: *The Godfather*, *Jaws* and *King Kong*. I'm not sure whether it is sentiment or reason, but I think I prefer them to anything else I have seen in that time. The cinema is a public place where, once, anyone could go and be overpowered by a work of the imagination. Our history has never known another form with this potential, and academic respectability is not worth its surrender. *King Kong*—the remake—is the best new love story I have seen in years, and when I took my daughter to it she was speechless for an hour afterwards at the tragic disruption of what was always an *amour fou*. *King Kong* is spectacular, lavish, funny, serious and moving: it is overwhelming. It is directed by John Guillermin, but it seems free from authorship or personality. As with *Jaws*, it manifests the nature of cinema, the fusion of reality and dream. Yet only Pauline Kael, I think, has stood up for it. She is the movie critic who most fully observes a sense of what a packed, entranced audience feels. That is still the essence of cinema. It reminds me of perhaps the most effective thing I did as a teacher: call a large class to sit tightly together, then slowly dim the house lights and let the screen burst forth with light and a roaring lion. Their faces were livid, apprehensive and hanging on the screen—and they were experiencing what is nearly a historic form.

'Always an amour fou...' Jessica Lange in the 1976 'King Kong'



John Howkins

REPORT ON

Ask someone the first need of a man stranded in the desert, and the answer is usually water. The answer is wrong: our most basic need is for information. This thought may seem an odd introduction to the Annan Report and its role in the making of communications policy. The information we receive through broadcasting often appears to be trite or repetitive. Television is popular because it is entertaining, supportive, conformist. But even television as entertainment deals in information, and information is power. The truism is so obvious nowadays that it is hardly ever spoken; perhaps it stands firmer on the opposite side. Without information—without the opportunity to select, distribute and use information—a person has no power. People who want information but do not have it are often particularly conscious of this.

On television, to become visible in a way that fits one's own vision is to become more powerful. For a writer or film-maker to use television to tell a story or reveal some facts as he wishes to do so, in his way, is to strengthen his claims to be heard, to be taken seriously. This is obvious. The gradual emergence of women presenters and newsreaders, as well as producers, the startling presence of *Roots* on American prime-time television, the serious treatment in *Z Cars* and (less often) *Coronation Street* of such taboos as incest, suicide, rape, the appearance in *Panorama* of the helplessness and tedium of a London comprehensive school—these mark enormously important times when the visibility of these people and events increased, dramatically.

We are particularly susceptible to television's flow of information and to what it makes more visible (and how) because television deals with 'reality' as much, if not more, than with 'fiction'. Television excels at real-time, live coverage (and recorded shows, whether LWT's *Supersonic* or BBC late-night chat shows, often act as if live). In the morning, 17 different announcers welcome you to ITV and BBC and stay to link programmes throughout the day. The main thrust of continuity, news, current affairs, advertisements, sports, documentaries, and the naturalism of most TV drama, reaffirm television's role as a chronicler of what is happening. Its information is believed, too. Surveys by both broadcasters and the Press suggest that TV has the most credibility. Finally,

TV is watched at home, among family and friends. And what guest insults or lies to his host—especially if they both know that he will be there tomorrow? TV is like a long-lost uncle. He may have his odd moments and sometimes his stories are a bit risqué, but he's been around a bit, he's a marvellous companion (a bit deaf, though) and he generally knows what's happening.

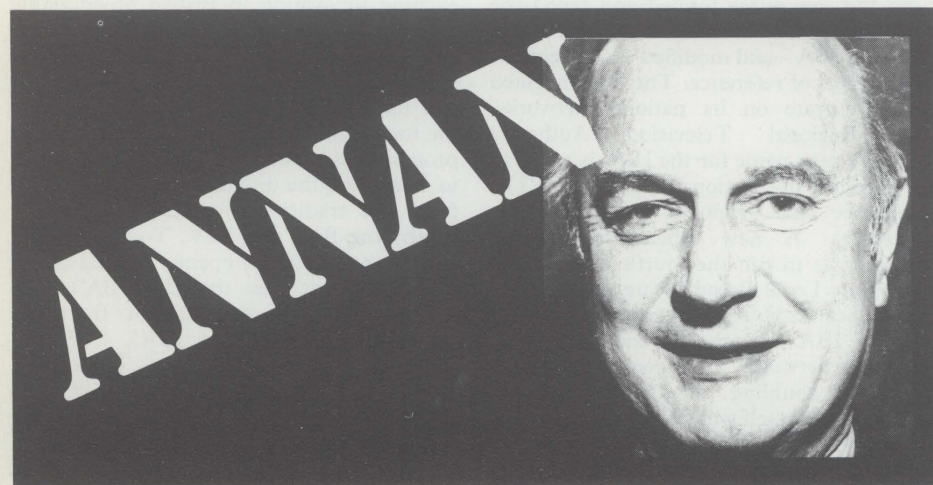
That is why the Annan Report is so fascinating—and yet, at the same time, so weak and so unhelpful. I should say, immediately, that the Annan Report is a substantial piece of work. A few hours after its publication Sir Denis Forman, Chairman of Granada TV, who was fiercely critical of many of the report's major proposals, said that it would be

'required reading for anyone interested in broadcasting for years to come.' The report's range and perception provide an excellent summary, with the occasional rich detail, of British broadcasting. It has wisdom; some fine investigatory reporting; an acute understanding of the British political process; and a healthy scepticism of the claims both of what it calls the 'powerful broadcasting lobby' and of those who wish to make radical changes. Its chapter on the Role of Broadcasting is as interesting and lucid as the 1962 Pilkington Report's chapter on The Purposes of Broadcasting—and, like Pilkington's chapter, is likely to be quoted often. Yet it is not all generalist. Details abound: the crèches at BBC Birmingham and Radio London's Asian programmes are scrutinised as closely as by any journalist.

Yet I hope the Committee will not be affronted if I say that I believe this praise is irrelevant. We have the right to expect a high-level government committee with a budget of more than £300,000 to produce a decent report, just as we expect the BBC to get newfilm of the day's major sports, ITN correspondents to know their subject extremely well, and local radio continuity announcers to cue their commercials at the right time. These things we should be able to take for granted. The substance of the matter is elsewhere.

Some history may help. Towards the end of the 60s, the principles and practices of British broadcasting that had served since the 40s with very little change began to look rather misguided and inconsistent and, in some cases, downright wrong. The faults were perceived both by broadcasters and the public, but the public's criticisms were the noisier and the more radical. The issue of programme standards was the most obvious and most talked about. In fact, most people who gave evidence to Lord Annan complained of bad language. Other popular topics were violence and explicit sex; the broadcasters' attitudes towards the churches, family, school and work; and the on-screen behaviour of interviewers and presenters. But the arguments over sex and naughty language were trivial compared to the profound if rather fragmented and incoherent debate that was—and is—going on in Britain, as well as in most other countries, about broadcasting as information, as power.

The awareness is worldwide. In the last few years almost every industrial country has faced—or is facing—the need to make some changes to its broadcasting system. In most cases the reforms have not been easy, and the results have not always been an improvement. In 1975 President Giscard d'Estaing completely demolished the old French system run by the ORTF, as he had promised during his election campaign. He replaced it by three semi-independent TV channels and several support organisations. The French do not appear to be happy with the changes. In Italy, the Constitutional Court has twice judged that RAI, the state broadcasting monopoly, should not be a monopoly at all and that private TV and radio over-the-air and cable stations should be allowed to broadcast in competition. However, the Italian parliament shows no signs of passing a new law to recognise the





The power of television: Angela Rippon

hundreds of stations which have sprung up. Two years ago, New Zealand abolished its Broadcasting Corporation and then, after 19 months, reinstated it. In the Netherlands, a new Broadcasting Law was laid before parliament only months before the government resigned. Even the USA's House Communications sub-committee, normally the most sanguine and inactive (except in defence of the status quo), has decided that the anachronistic 1934 Communications Act desperately needs a rewrite 'from attic to basement'.

The feelings of uneasiness and dissatisfaction were remarkably similar from country to country. The power of broadcasting was being challenged on two fronts. Policy-makers were being flooded with new communications technologies, systems and services (both current models and future possibilities). It was becoming increasingly clear that these technologies would have significant implications of a cultural, social, economic, industrial and legal nature. Yet it was also clear that no one really understood the new technologies, or the options that were implied. This partly explains why policy-makers were so reluctant to face up to these issues. There was, however, an increased awareness of the necessity to choose.

The new technologies offered a range of communication that was quite different, both quantitatively and qualitatively, from anything previously experienced. But the public could offer little assistance. No longer was there a suitably tidy set of needs, demands, wants and desires—and priorities—on which policy-makers could judge the new options, and on which they could build new systems.

Enough of this was clear in Britain at the end of the 60s for numerous people to urge the Labour Government to investigate the state of broadcasting, to correct some obvious wrongs and to make preparations for the future. After some hiccoughs, the result was the appointment in April 1974 of Lord Annan, Provost of University College, London, to chair a committee 'to consider the future of the broadcasting services in the United Kingdom, including the dissemination by wire of broadcast and

other programmes and of television for public showing; to consider the implications for present or any recommended additional services of new techniques; and to propose what constitutional, organisational and financial arrangements and what conditions should apply to the conduct of all these services.'

The members of Lord Annan's Committee were appointed in July 1974. They ranged from people with some experience of broadcasting (Phillip Whitehead MP and Anthony Jay, both TV producers, and Marghanita Laski) to those with none (Sarah Morrison, a vice-chairman of the Tory Party, and Sir James Mackay, a former civil servant). Also included were Tom Jackson, head of the Post Office Workers Union, Professor Hilde Himmelweit, a sociologist with an international knowledge of communications research, and Dipak Nandy, formerly of the Runnymede Trust. The report was published on March 24 this year. The final revised version had been leaked to the *Observer* the Sunday before publication (it had been offered to the *Sunday Times*, who had turned it down on the grounds that broadcasting was boring, a reason that appalled its editor when he discovered the leak in the first edition of the *Observer*).

The motif of the report is pluralism. The committee proposes four watchwords for the future: 'accountability through parliament to a public which should be given more chance to make its voice heard; diversity of services; flexibility of structure; and editorial independence.' These principles lie at the heart of its proposals. Lord Annan has elaborated his committee's thinking. 'Our proposals led us to the conclusion that broadcasting ought to continue to be organised under Broadcasting Authorities—which is what the Governors of the BBC and the Members of the IBA are. People should be able to have more television and radio channels to watch and listen to. The technology is there to provide them. But we do not want more of the same. We want different sorts of programmes, different sources of editorial judgments. We can get these only if we untie the straitjacket which threatens to encompass broadcasting. We can get these only if new channels and services are not spatchcocked into old Authorities. Only if new Authorities are appointed will the new channels provide genuinely new services geared to the needs of the public they serve.'

So the committee topped and tailed the two existing Broadcasting Authorities—the BBC and IBA—and modified each organisation's terms of reference. The BBC is asked to concentrate on its national networks. The Regional Television Authority (Annan's new name for the IBA) is asked to concentrate on regional television. The committee also proposed two brand-new authorities. A new Open Broadcasting Authority is to run the fourth TV channel and a new Local Broadcasting Authority is to run local radio stations (whether born of BBC or IBA parenthood) and local cable television networks. The committee hopes that the doubling of the number of Authorities in itself will encourage diversity. It has also tried to produce Broadcasting Authorities which are more explicitly and

perhaps more accurately designed for their particular tasks.

According to the Annan Committee, the necessary complement to this four-stroke model of broadcasting is an active and involved public. It proposes several ways to achieve this. An independent Broadcasting Complaints Commission should handle all complaints. It should have more money than the BBC's and IBA's existing internal commissions, and considerably more powers. A new Public Enquiry Board should investigate each Broadcasting Authority every seven years, at least, and at any other time (generally, it is envisaged, for a specific reason) that the Home Secretary asks it to do so. Its enquiries should be public. What is more, says the report, the allocation of a broadcasting franchise to an ITV company or a commercial radio station should always be preceded by a local public hearing. The BBC and ITV companies should waive copyright on the programme information they now print in the *Radio Times* and *TV Times* so that others can publish full TV listings and comment. There were, in all, several hundred recommendations.

To understand the report—indeed, the entire operation—it is necessary to stand back a bit and take a long look at the whole business of making communications policy in the way that Britain has chosen—or stumbled upon. The committee was asked to 'consider the future of the broadcasting services in the U.K. . . (and) to consider the implications . . . of new techniques.' It produced a report which proposed maintaining the basic structure and conventions of British broadcasting: e.g. no Minister of Communications, no overall body to replace the BBC Governors and IBA Members, no changes to the central basis of the BBC and ITV companies. The meat of the report is in its hundreds of specific recommendations, adding here, taking away there, adjusting, synchronising and generally tidying up. But I believe the appointment of the committee and the attitude of its report reflect a particular interpretation, a notion, about British broadcasting both now and in the 80s and 90s. If I am right, then I am disappointed, because I believe the interpretation to be misconceived. To illustrate this, I want to look at the fourth channel, cable television, teletext and local radio.

The Open Broadcasting Authority is an exciting innovation in British broadcasting—indeed, in the broadcasting of any country. Lord Annan sees it as a 'genuine force for a new type of broadcasting. The OBA will not produce programmes but will use the fourth channel to publish other people's programmes.' The word 'publish' is meant to signify a quite different kind of operation from the traditional broadcasting carried out by the BBC and ITV. To kill one red herring before it has opened its first gill, I should make it clear that the OBA's publishing is also quite different from the publishing done by the ABC, CBS and NBC networks in America. Those networks, of course, produce very few programmes. By federal regulation, they are forbidden to produce practically anything except news, sports programmes and

'specials'. They are publishers, distributors of other people's programmes. Their aim is to buy and network programmes that will attract, minute-by-minute, the audience whose age, sex, occupation and income are most attractive to advertisers. The American networks do not so much sell programmes to audiences as sell audiences to advertisers. To say that the OBA will be a publisher is to say only that it is somehow different from the in-house production factories of the BBC and ITV. Its actual aims and activities, and the programmes it transmits, will not be shaped by such vague descriptions but by practical details of organisation and finance, and by its aims.

It is significant, then, that the Annan Report says a great deal about the OBA's aims, a little about its finance, and nothing about its organisation. The aims are clearly to encourage 'productions which say something new in new ways'. It envisages three kinds of programmes that might do this: Open University programmes, ITV programmes and programmes made by independent producers. Crucial to the idea of the OBA is the report's recommendations that it should not have the same obligations as the BBC and IBA to ensure a 'balanced evening's viewing'. Nor would it have to take responsibility for the content of OBA programmes, as do the BBC and IBA. The committee clearly faced a very real problem in the fourth channel. Administering and programming a new TV channel is an extremely risky business. ITV was forced to make many changes in its first few years; BBC-2 made a more disastrous start with Michael Peacock's decision to give entire evenings, in turn, to music or drama or current affairs, and had to change even more drastically.

The committee surely made the right decision in recommending that the channel should be run by an independent authority with a brief to encourage 'productions which say something new in new ways', and to do so by buying ideas and finished programmes from outside producers. But the committee shrank from the task of making firm recommendations on the new Authority's structure, composition and financing. The committee clearly wanted the discussion following publication of its report to investigate all possibilities. Admirable! But the result is a blur, and on several crucial points the report is vulnerable.

The question of ITV's contribution to the OBA is one of the most prickly and disputed. Most ITV companies have plenty of money and plenty of talent. The OBA needs both. But why, the companies ask, should they help a rival organisation? After all, they have been arguing for years that TV-4 should be given to ITV and run as ITV-2. The Annan Committee try to enlist ITV's help in suggesting that the OBA could lease 'several consecutive hours' to either the IBA or the ITV companies. The companies could then put on the fourth channel some of their more awkward, so-called 'minority' programming (schools programmes, opera, ballet, late-night discussions) which do not fit ITV-1. Obviously, they will not switch all their 'minority' programmes, because the companies would still probably like ITV-1 to present an image of a rounded, varied channel with a

wide appeal. As a result, ITV-1 would be more intensely and perhaps overwhelmingly competitive with BBC-1 (the ratings for March, the latest available at the time of writing, give ITV 56% against BBC-1's 37%). A fourth channel is likely to take most of its audience from BBC-2 and then from BBC-1 and ITV. These figures show why the BBC was fiercely opposed to ITV being given any access to the fourth channel. It fears equally for BBC-1 and BBC-2 (which usually gets around 7% of the audience). There is, of course, no reason why the BBC should not be perfectly content with around 45% except the feeling that the recipient of the licence fee should be seen to be moderately popular, in terms of ratings, with the general public.

The report's proposals for the fourth channel and the OBA are among its most far-reaching and most contentious. The proposals found few outright supporters. Most people praised the idea but attacked the details. The main critics have been the film and TV unions (ACTT, ABS, Musicians Union, etc.), the executives of both the BBC and ITV, the IBA and the Conservative Party. Their criticisms have generally been that the committee did not think things through; that it failed to work out the implications. The ITV companies said, in a bemused, dismissive manner, 'This is a patchwork, not a network.' The President of the ACTT, the writer Robert Bolt, asked, 'What is the need for it? Where is the demand for it? What is its purpose? And above all, how is it to be financed?'

The crucial point underlying these well practised arguments is that the Annan Committee has not actually advanced the discussion about the fourth channel by so much as twenty-four frames. To no one's surprise, the committee favoured the idea of a national, open body over an ITV-2. But that is all. The report sanctions such a body, baptises it and gives it publicity. As we saw above, the committee made no recommendations on its size, shape, con-

stitution or powers—and said very little about its possible relationship with its programme suppliers. The hard work is yet to come.

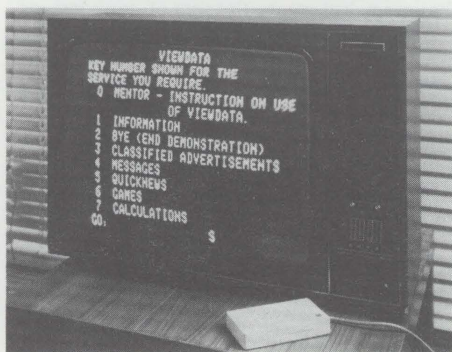
The committee's treatment of cable television, teletext and local radio is disappointing for roughly the same reasons. Cable television uses (mostly) co-axial cable to bring at least twelve and often more channels into each subscriber's home for a weekly fee of around 50p. It is booming in Canada, where this year half the country is expected to get its TV from cable, and in the USA and Japan. It hardly exists in Britain, partly because both the BBC and IBA transmitters can cover virtually all households and also because the three channels tend to transmit roughly the same programmes at the same time (so someone in London can already see what is being transmitted in Birmingham). However, cable has two advantages over the over-the-air transmissions of national television. It can distribute a virtually unlimited number of channels and, once installed, it can therefore distribute local signals extremely easily and cheaply.

The committee saw cable TV primarily as a local community service. Strangely, it hardly mentioned the three current cable stations, Greenwich Cablevision, Swindon Viewpoint and Milton Keynes' Channel 40. But the committee appeared to be broadly in agreement with the aims of at least the two most active stations, Swindon Viewpoint and Channel 40. It is a pity the committee did not give more prominence to both models of 'local community services'. It was predictable, perhaps, that more would be said about Pay-TV which, although rejected as a 'ravenous parasite', is part of the established litany of broadcasting and therefore more readily comprehensible.

Teletext was the real teaser. By the end of the year, estimates the BBC, subscribers to the three existing UK cable systems will be outnumbered by people with teletext decoders. Teletext comes in two quite different forms. The first to be developed (by the BBC and IBA) uses some spare capacity in a normal TV signal to deliver a message which a teletext decoder attached to an ordinary TV set can print out on the TV screen. Both the BBC's Ceefax and ITV's Oracle are already in operation, although there are very few private decoders (they are expensive). At the moment they are concentrating on news headlines, TV schedules, sports results, stock exchange prices, etc. The Post Office's Viewdata system is much more sophisticated. It uses the telephone network to provide a two-way link between an ordinary TV set and the Post Office's data banks in which third parties called 'information providers' can store information. For the price of a local telephone call, you can call the computer and ask it to display specific information on your own TV set. It is possible—and sometimes necessary—to have a fairly detailed conversation with the computer. Information can be private (e.g., I can leave a message for my wife) or available to everyone. Some information is free, but most will probably carry an extra charge.

Clearly, an awkward beast. Is it broadcasting, telecommunications or publishing?

Variations on teletext: the BBC's Ceefax; the Post Office's more sophisticated Viewdata



Definitions of each, whether taken from Statute (e.g. the Wireless Telegraphy Act), common law (trade agreements on publishing) or convention, are elastic and unsatisfactory. The committee could not agree. Hilde Himmelweit, Dipak Nandy, Phillip Whitehead and two others argued that Ceefax and Oracle were 'publishing rather than broadcasting'. In a note of dissent, they proposed a split between transmission (to be carried out by the BBC and IBA) and the control of editorial content (to be decided by an independent board). That dissent did not stretch to Viewdata. But they were overruled by a majority of the committee who believed that teletext mixed 'some of the characteristics of broadcasting and of telecommunications services.' The committee proposed that Ceefax and Oracle should continue in their present form. It did not say much about Viewdata.

Again, it was probably predictable that the committee, including the dissenters, would be more interested in Ceefax and Oracle than in Viewdata. There are two possible reasons—neither is very admirable. The first is that Ceefax and Oracle have been developed by the Broadcasting Authorities and Viewdata by the Post Office. The second is that Ceefax/Oracle is a one-way device of limited application, while Viewdata is a two-way device with some thousand times more capacity, and much greater implications. More of this bias later.

Local radio is more familiar. The BBC has 20 stations and wants 45 more. The IBA has 19 and also wants many more. The results of the 39 existing stations are so varied that generalisations are impudent. But, by way of contrast, I would say that the BBC stations tend to be more worthy, more local, more talkative. The IBA stations tend to be more brash, more aggressive and—above all—to favour the national Top Forty over local goings-on, musical or not, that may be less easily articulated.

The committee's support of local radio is one of its strongest points. But its plans for its reorganisation under a new Local Broadcasting Authority are quite a different matter and even more contentious than its plans for the fourth channel. The reason is that local radio already exists and the stations and their defenders have a range of commitments and interests that they do not want disturbed. The IBA has welcomed the idea of a Local Broadcasting Authority to regulate local radio and cable. The IBA Head of Radio, John Thompson, feels it would mark the public recognition of local radio as a service with unique strengths and benefits. But most of the IBA's stations are reluctant to leave the shelter of the big Authority.

The BBC and its stations are much more hostile. They resent the idea of a 'rival' Authority but, much more vehemently, they resent the proposal that *all* local radio stations, including the existing BBC ones, should look to advertising for their main source of revenue. Without the licence fee, the BBC stations feel nude. They know that the report's proposal will mean that virtually all local radio is dependent solely on advertising. There may be some exceptions. The report hopes that non-profit trusts may be set up so that some stations may be only partially dependent on advertising. Sir

Michael Swann, BBC Chairman, does not look kindly on this idea. He calls it 'pie-in-the-sky'.

Is it possible to discern any theme, any common thread, in the committee's majority attitudes to these four matters? Presumably the committee feels that their proposals should produce better programmes. Its report says, 'We regard the programmes as unquestionably the most important—and arguably the only—test of a broadcasting system.' The criterion is the obvious one, the common one. It was enshrined in the Pilkington Report and has served moderately well since then. But do we know what it means? It is possible to have an agreeable and useful discussion about good and bad books, good and bad pictures, and—though more difficult—good and bad films. We may not reach agreement, but we acknowledge the viability of discussion. But is it possible to have a discussion about good and bad television or good and bad local communications, good and bad teletext, good and bad cable messages, good and bad fourth channels? Yet the policy for each depends not only on such discussions, but on agreement, on consensus.

The committee attempts to deal with this conundrum by saying: let us have diversity. Let a thousand programmes bloom so that everyone's idea of a good programme is somehow, somewhere, transmitted. It is a perfectly respectable answer and the committee is responding to many entirely praiseworthy suggestions in proposing it. It is true that almost all industrial societies do need a large number of communication channels of different sizes and scopes. But it is not the whole answer.

Why does even this simple test seem insufficient? Why are these issues so obdurate, so slippery that even the most common criterion—'arguably the only test'—cannot wrap them up? There may be a clue in the report itself. It is splendidly wise (to use a splendidly sonorous Annan-ism) in its earlier chapters on the past and present of broadcasting. It is especially sharp-eyed on the present workings of Whitehall. But, significantly, it becomes less impressive as it moves into the years ahead and its scope widens beyond broadcasting as currently conceived. Of course, the members of the committee are not prophets. But more fundamental and more worrying is the committee's apparent failure to grasp that the future of broadcasting (the subject of their essay) depends increasingly on technologies, systems and services that are outside broadcasting as currently understood. Moreover, not only is the technology—transmission by radio wave—rapidly changing, but so are the sets of conventions, needs, expectations and satisfactions that surround it. It is indisputable that the committee's three-year labour moved the argument forward by many steps (as well as, and perhaps more often, consolidating the steps of others). But there are a hundred more steps immediately ahead. Typically, the report says that the crucial question is 'how to reconcile independence and control'. It suggests a strategy of pluralism and diversity. That is the conventional wisdom.

There is another question which, in the long run (certainly within the ambit of the

committee's 15 years), may be crucial. Put grandly, it is how to use our communications resources in order to match our individual, group and societal communication needs. This question cannot be answered in the context of broadcasting as conceived by the Home Secretary when he wrote the committee's first terms of reference in 1970 (only to have his government lose the general election a few months later), nor by his successor in 1974 who reappointed Lord Annan and actually got the committee under way. It needs a wider context—perhaps the entire range of electronic communication.

The pressures for keeping the terms of reference as narrow as possible are understandable. The bureaucrats prefer it. Broadcasting is already a highly complex and diverse activity. It can be argued that it is already wide enough and that any attempt to widen it further would jeopardise our current insights and understanding. Surely, the opposite is true. The nature of electronic communications, including broadcasting, has changed irrevocably. Isn't it daft for the government to have simultaneous but separate inquiries into broadcasting, the Post Office (chaired by Charles Carter), the Press (chaired by O. R. McGregor) and film? It is trebly confusing that the Annan Committee was a Committee of Inquiry set up by the Home Office, the Carter Committee is a committee of review set up by the Department of Industry and the McGregor inquiry is a Royal Commission set up directly by the Prime Minister. The circumstances of the film inquiry, which may lead to a British Film Authority, are as confusing again.

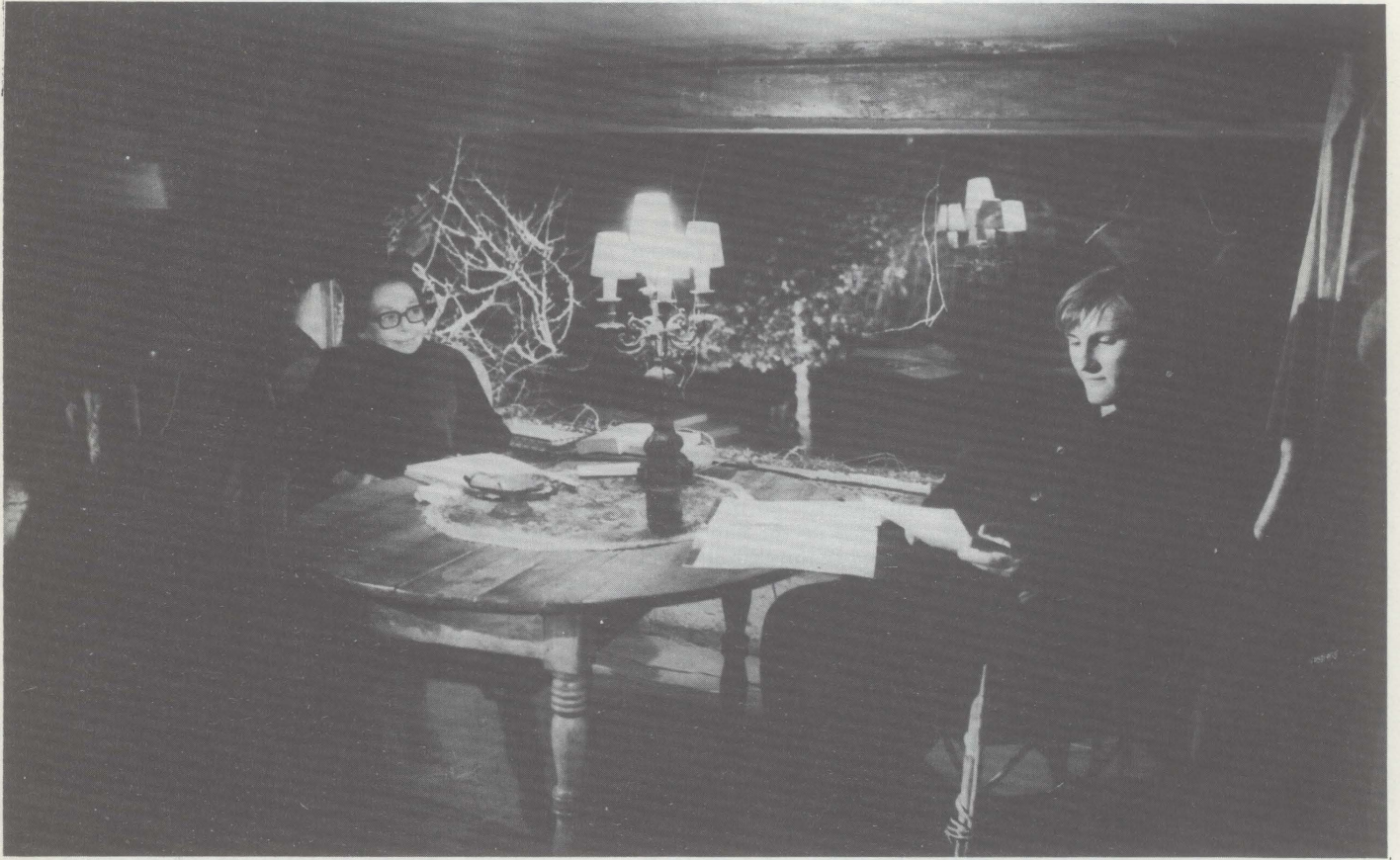
To subject each part of the communications business to such different kinds of inquiry is ridiculous. At one level, broadcasters quite properly fail to see why the Press has a Royal Commission while they get only a committee. Some of the distinctions are merely silly (for instance, a Royal Commission has a budget for wine for its meetings, while a committee of inquiry can afford only tea or coffee). Many others are fundamental, and crucial to the success of the tricky business of making sensible communications policy.

The truth is that the British government lacks the wherewithal to deal with the rapidly increasing number of issues that now confront policy-makers. Government responsibilities and interests are not comprehensive and not co-ordinated. This is partly a typical British tactic to ensure that except on a few explicit occasions the government does not intervene in the media. But the fact that government retains overall control (for technical and political reasons), and is extremely tight-fisted about the awarding of broadcasting rights to others, means that this tactic, admirable for so many liberal reasons, is in danger of becoming an excuse for doing nothing. When the time is ripe, government finds it difficult to move quickly and decisively—or even to move at all. Its multifarious committees are likewise inhibited and handicapped. The Annan Committee has produced a list of highly interesting and stimulating proposals and ideas. Like the curate's egg, it will remain famous for its parts. ■

The Left Bank Revisited

Richard Roud

'Le Camion': Marguerite Duras and Gérard Depardieu



Fifteen years ago, faced with the luxuriant flowering of new talents in French cinema, I tried to draw a distinction between the *Cahiers du Cinéma* group (Chabrol, Truffaut, Godard) and what I called the Left Bank group: Resnais, Marker and Varda. As I said at the time, this classification was only a kind of analogy; it proved nothing, and was only valuable if it could tell us more about what was being classified. At that time, Chris Marker's work was totally unknown in Britain and America; we had seen Varda's *Cléo* and some of her shorts. But we had seen *Hiroshima, mon Amour* and *Marienbad*. And we knew that Resnais had edited Varda's first feature, *La Pointe Courte*, that Marker and Resnais had co-directed a subsequently banned film, *Les Statues Meurent Aussi*. What else did the three have in common? Agnès Varda suggested it was their shared love of cats, but admitted that there might be something more.

So the article printed in *SIGHT AND SOUND* was called 'The Left Bank'. That was where they all lived, but Left Bank implies a state of mind and what is now—loathsome, but usefully—called a life-style. A fondness, then, for the Bohemian life, a rejection of Right Bank conformity, a high degree of involvement in literature and the plastic arts, and a consequent interest in experimental film-making. It also implies a political viewpoint well to the left of centre.

Since those days, many things have changed: 'Right Bank' Godard became perhaps the most left-wing of all, and the differences between Chabrol and Truffaut became greater than the similarities. But

the Left Bank group, although they no longer work with each other, still maintains a kind of identity. What kind?

Before answering that question, one must trace what has happened to each of them over the past fifteen years. Resnais went on to make *Muriel* in 1963; to many, his finest film, it was a commercial failure and a lean decade for Resnais was the result. Only three films, *La Guerre est Finie*, *Je t'aime, je t'aime* and—most successfully, in my view—*Stavisky*... Varda had her biggest commercial hit with *Le Bonheur* and her biggest flop with *Les Créatures*. Then came *Lions Love* in 1969, and after that nothing. Unless one counts a film for French television (*Nausicaa*) which they refused to

show for political reasons, and a film for German television (*Daguerrotypes*) that fell somewhat short of the standards she had previously set for herself. Marker's *Le Joli Mai* appeared in 1963; then there followed *Le Mystère Koumiko* and *Si j'avais quatre Dromadaires*, his last 'personal' film. He went on film-making but only as a member of various co-operatives. He 'co-operated' on *Far from Vietnam* (as did Resnais and Varda), *Classes de Lutte*, *The Sixth Side of the Pentagon*, and a number of politically militant films. But the Chris Marker we had known died, he insisted, in 1967. Well, yes and no. He did sign one film in the 70s, a documentary on Yves Montand called *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Singer*.

Then came 1977. Why this year should have become the *annus mirabilis* for the Left Bank group, I really don't know. A series of circumstances, the swing of events, the turning wheel of fortune? Whatever the reasons, 1977 saw the return—*en force*—of all three directors. The first to arrive was Resnais with *Providence*. Gilbert Adair reviewed the film in the Spring issue of *SIGHT AND SOUND*: if I read him correctly, he thinks, as I do, that this was Resnais' best work since *Muriel*. But there is one point I would like to make about the film—and it is a point relevant also to Marguerite Duras' new film *Le Camion*. I think too

much has been made of the narrative device of *Providence*—the notion that we are seeing reality through the eyes of an author trying to write a novel. To me, this is simply a device, and the interest of *Providence* does not lie in any light it might shed on the creative processes. The interchanging of characters that goes on in Clive Langham's mind is not only an expression of the way a novelist's mind is supposed to work. It is much more the expression of an important truth about human relationships. We do take on other roles, and these roles are usually derived from our family history.

Before Freud, Tin Pan Alley discovered that men choose and act towards their wives as their fathers did towards their mothers: 'I want a girl/Just like the girl/That married dear old dad.' And women towards their husbands as their mothers towards their fathers. More bizarrely, but just as frequently, the analysts tell us, one can find oneself acting towards one's spouse as one acted towards one's mother or father; and one can even manipulate the spouse into acting towards oneself as one's parent did. So when Claud Langham (Dirk Bogarde) begins to talk like Clive Langham (John Gielgud), when his mistress is played by the Elaine Stritch who also 'plays' his dead mother, when he kills his brother as if he were killing his father, these are not just fascinating examples of the way a writer's mind works; the film is about how *all* our minds work.

Providence was soon followed by Agnès Varda's *L'Une Chante, l'Autre Pas* (*One Sings, the Other Doesn't*). Although it is more accessible and much warmer than her earlier films, it is clearly the work of the author of *La Pointe Courte*. The title itself is an expression of Varda's persistent interest in 'doubling'. *La Pointe Courte* doubled a political film with the story of a marriage on the rocks. *Lions Love* also doubled several stories and (scandalously, to some) even related the story of a hippy ménage à trois to the assassination of Robert Kennedy. And there was an ambitious project called *La Mélange* which was to have been about a woman who got everything mixed up. ('*La Mélange*', a personal neologism of

Varda's, can translate as Mixitis.) And, like everyone of her generation, she was fascinated by Faulkner's device in *The Wild Palms* of two stories printed in alternating chapters which did not have any obvious connection with each other.

In her new film, she begins with two fused stories, one of a young woman with two children who lives with an unsuccessful photographer, and the other about a younger former neighbour who tries to help her friend get an abortion. Then the lines abruptly diverge: the photographer hangs himself and Suzanne (Thérèse Liotard) is forced to go back to her peasant family. The lines converge ten years later at an abortion rally: each of the women has come, in a different way, to a consciousness of the condition of womanhood. The meeting is warm, but circumstances force the two apart, and the distance that separates them (Iran to Hyères) is bridged by postcards. Pauline (alias Pomme, and played by a great new discovery, Valérie Mairesse) pursues her singing career, meets an Iranian economist, marries him, and bears him a child—only to discover that with the birth of a son his pro-feminist façade drops to reveal the traditional *pater familias*.

Suzanne, on the other hand, raises her three bastards, starts a family planning clinic, and marries a paediatrician. Only in an epilogue do they all get together again to wind up the film like the last chapter of a 19th-century novel. Wind it up as far as the plot goes; but the film asks many more questions than it answers. Although it is clear that Varda has views, she does not impose them on her audience. And in any case, the differences between the two women themselves give us alternative approaches. So without being didactic (except in a few of the songs), the film has a great deal to say. Varda's dialogue is as wittily literary as always, but there is a new simplification of *mise en scène* which neatly sets off the occasional verbal preciosity.

Of all three directors, however, the master of the word is Chris Marker. The title of his new film is even too clever to be translatable. *Le Fond de l'air est Rouge*: well, the '*fond de l'air*' does not exist as a concept

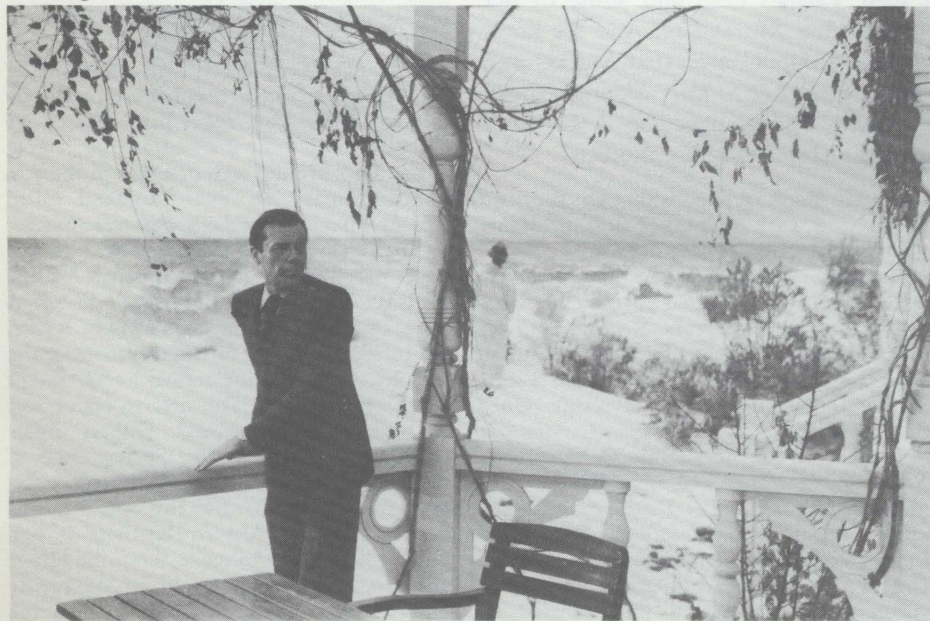
in English, but it does in French folklore, as when people say on a day in May that the '*fond de l'air*' is still cold—meaning that although it is warm in the sun, the atmosphere has not yet warmed up. So, if the '*fond de l'air*' is red, this means—putting it crudely—that although the real revolution (I almost said the real right revolution, but that Jamesian expression could be gravely misinterpreted) has not yet occurred, it is, shall we say, 'in the air'. And Marker's film traces the vanguard revolutionary movements from 1967 on.

The film has not yet opened. At the time of writing, however, editing has been completed, and that was the major task since the film (all four hours of it) is to be made up of pieces of other people's films. Not extracts (this is no *That's Revolution*), but the parts that never got into finished films. Sections that were cut by censors, sequences which the directors censored themselves, scenes dropped for other reasons. Marker is also using pieces of television film—films which were shown, but only once, and which were thereafter buried forever. 1967, Marker says, was the decisive year. The Chinese Cultural Revolution was 'taken in hand', and the failure of the revolutionary left in Venezuela was, he thinks, even more significant, if less spectacular, than the murder of Che Guevara in Bolivia. From 1967 on, the powers that be began to infiltrate and control the 'subversive groups', and traditional politicians (from all parties, right and left) began to secrete the necessary antibodies to check the advance of the leftist infection. But, says Marker, 'we' didn't know that then; and, using a typical and inimitably Markerian comparison, the leftist movements continued like Boris Karloff's bowling ball in *Scarface* to knock down the tenpins after the hand that bowled the ball was already dead. Continued to the apex of their influence in the stunning if futile parades of 1968: the Prague spring, May in Paris, Mexico . . .

But was it all futile? That remains to be seen. Yes, Czechoslovakia was occupied, Allende was crushed, and the Chinese myth, so long protected by our Eurocentrism, was shattered. And yet, even these failures do not affect the fact that nothing can ever be as it was before '68. Certain acts were committed, certain things were said, certain forces came into being. And in the film he will retrace the path traversed by the revolutionary left—not to find the guilty, but the innocent. Even (and especially) when the innocence of '67 has become the crime of '77 and vice versa.

But there will be some Marker footage in the film too. In 1952 he had shot the Olympic Games in Helsinki. And running over the film recently, he discovered that a jump-team medallist that year was a Chilean who later became one of the four generals of the Junta. It was indeed ex-horseman Mendoza who thought up the idea of using the Santiago stadium as the place to round up political prisoners (see *Providence*). So what was it that Marker had really filmed in 1952: the rider or the future general? The film will be a kind of dialogue. It would be too easy to indulge in facetious contradictions: instead each step of this imaginary dialogue will attempt to create a third voice which will be produced

Dirk Bogarde in '*Providence*'



by the meeting of the first two and yet distinct from either of them. Marker doesn't boast that he has succeeded in making a dialectical film. But he has tried (having in his time, he says, abused the exercise of power by the commentator-director) for once to give back to the viewer, through montage, his own commentary; which is to say, his own power.

This sounds to me like a film worth waiting for, and a worthy third panel of the 1977 Left Bank triptych. But there is a fourth film that belongs here too: Marguerite Duras' *Le Camion* (for a wonder, an official French selection at Cannes). Duras can be considered a member of the Left Bank group for many reasons. Her first film work was the script for Resnais' *Hiroshima, mon Amour*, and her second a script for Resnais' editor Henri Colpi (*Une Aussi Longue Absence*). And of course she is also a Left Banker in her choice of residence, of lifestyle, in her interest (to say the least) in literature, and in her left-wing non-Communist party politics.

The ostensible subject of *Le Camion* is a film-maker (played by Mme. Duras herself) going over the script of a film she wants to make with the other leading player (Gérard Depardieu). Someone joked that this must be the cheapest film ever to compete at Cannes, because all the dialogue scenes were shot in a room in Mme. Duras' house, there are only two actors, and the only other footage (but what footage!) is of the truck itself rolling through the desolate wastes of the Yvelines, an exurban department west of Paris where the blank landscape is punctuated only by hideous housing developments and garish hypermarkets.

However, as I suggested with regard to *Providence*, the device of discussing an unmade film is *only* a device; it is not the real subject of the film. True enough, for much of the time we do get Duras reading lines to Depardieu, and the actor asking questions about the characters each would be playing (this is a film in the conditional tense). Who would she be, asks Depardieu of the woman he, as truck-driver, would give a lift to. *Declassée*, says Duras; that's all one can say about her. But of course there is much more to be said, because this woman is a number of women. To begin with, she is the heroine of *Hiroshima, mon Amour* grown old: 'Ah, que j'étais jeune un jour,' says Duras, quoting *Hiroshima*. 'She wanted to die for love . . . but she lived on.' Depardieu is made to suggest that the woman has perhaps escaped from a local lunatic asylum. Duras neither confirms nor denies the accusation. Perhaps she is on the way to the christening of her nephew Abraham, whose family lives in an impossible spot to which there is only one bus a day. She talks once or twice about her childhood—far, far away from France. 'There was a river.' The Mekong, perhaps? We are never told, but the woman could be the young heroine of *Barrage contre le Pacifique*, she could also be Anne-Marie Stretter, Lol V. Stein. She is almost certainly the Asian beggar woman from *India Song*. But she is probably also Jewish.

In short, she is Marguerite Duras in all her fictional and non-fictional roles—all the women she was, all the women she imag-



'L'Une Chante, l'Autre Pas': Thérèse Liotard, Valerie Mairesse

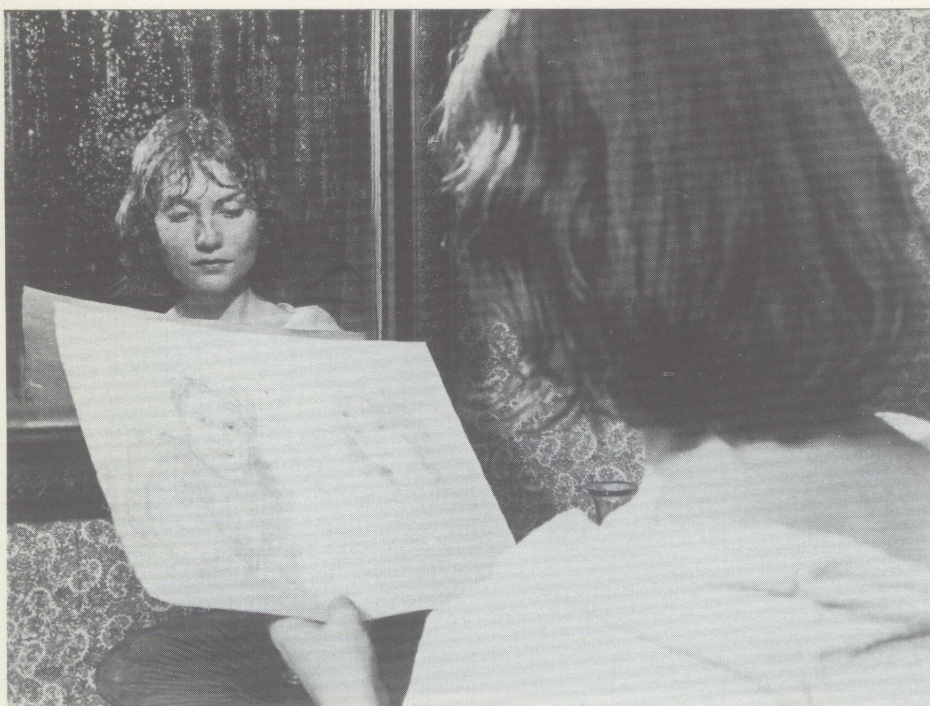
ined herself to be. And, like Duras, this woman is someone who has lost faith in politics, lost faith in the proletariat. Blasphemy! So she thought, for a long time, but when she saw the complicity between the bosses and the workers to prevent the occurrence of a real free revolution, when she saw that the invasion of Prague was the direct result of collusion between capitalism and socialism, she knew that she was right: Karl Marx is finished. Towards the end of the film, she would get out of the lorry—in the middle of nowhere. Perhaps, *en route*, they would have stopped at a roadside café, and he would have learned from a waitress that the lady he picked up did the same thing every day: hitch a lift in order to tell the driver her life story . . .

All the dialogue is shot with the two seated at a table. But much of the action of the film is on the road; for the lorry itself, a magnificent five-axle, blue Fruehauf, is the third character of the film. Its movements through the countryside and the roundabouts are as rhythmical as what Penelope Gilliatt once called Duras' back-stitching dialogue. I must confess that I don't really know what back-stitching is, but it sounds right for Duras' style. And the truck goes in for some back-stitching too; its movements are all the more premonitory because we never see its driver, nor do we hear the sound of the engine. Silently, it wanders through the fields, up and down hills, its movements never quite matching the dialogue. When the woman says she would get out in the middle of a heath, we see the lorry slow down and we expect it to stop. But no, it moves slowly on to a more travelled road, merges with the other lorries in the stream of traffic on a crowded highway. And probably the other lorry-drivers don't know what they are carrying either. When the woman asks our driver, he says that he doesn't know—they are all containers and who knows what's in them, or what their final destination is.

'So that's how it ends?' asks Depardieu. Yes, it's over. That is all we ever find out

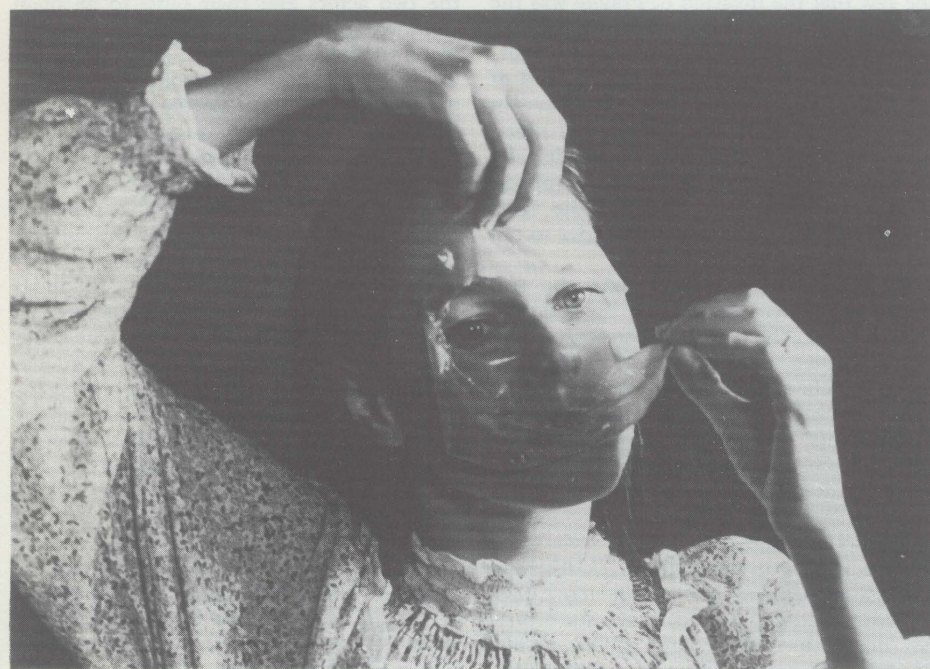
about the two people. The camera then moves forward towards the table where they are sitting and moves past them to a bright source of light: a white-curtained window with what seems to be some mystical light glowing from behind. Then the camera angle changes, and we see past the two actors and their table to an open window: her lips are moving, but the dialogue track has gone dead. All we hear (as we have heard at various moments throughout the film) is one of Beethoven's 'Diabelli Variations'. And then we see through an open window on to a terrace with a tall oak waving in the wind—and, next to it, a single klieg light. So that is what provided the 'mystical' brightness behind the curtain, one could say. Or, the light is there to show us that while pretending to talk about making a film, a film has actually been made: the one we have just seen. One could say both these things, and say them dismissively. But *Le Camion* is *not* an *exercice de style*; it is not just about a woman talking about making a film. Its real subject is Marguerite Duras in 1977, just as the real subject of *Providence*, David Mercer or not, is Alain Resnais in 1977.

Much as I liked *India Song*, I prefer *Le Camion*. *India Song* had many obvious attractions: its gorgeous interiors, its exoticism, its seductive tango music, its even more seductive Delphine Seyrig. *Le Camion* has nothing: nothing but Marguerite Duras and Gérard Depardieu; that room and that truck, that landscape and Beethoven. And with these meagre materials, Duras has made her most achieved film. It is also her shortest: one hour and eighteen minutes. But a film of this intensity, of this spareness, couldn't be borne for much longer. And also of this degree of pessimism: 'Let the world go to wrack and ruin,' says Duras/the Woman. And yet, however pessimistic her intentions, the sheer nerve of a film like this, plus its physical beauty (Bruno Nuytten on the camera), gave me a sense of exaltation that was anything but a 'downer'.



Isabelle Huppert in 'La Dentellière'; Geraldine Chaplin in 'Elisa, Vida Mia'

CANNES 77



Sayings at Cannes this year: 'Of course you realise that everyone here is selling and nobody is buying.'—'Have you thought how many of these films were made for TV—or will only be shown on TV? Next year we could have it all on video cassettes.' 'You know, every year during this festival somebody dies...' If these snatches sound somewhat jaundiced, they were. For the first ten days of Cannes 77, at any event, there was a notable shortage of masterworks, the films that make the journey not only necessary but reviving. With a festival offering upwards of 90 screenings a day, there's always a suspicion that one has made the wrong pick from the

multifarious lucky dip; but the mood of the town was lacklustre, a workaday festival without sensation, adventure, discovery or greatness.

Part of the problem, paradoxically, may be a general television-influenced (or film school trained?) level of passable mediocrity. Films become nationally interchangeable: the Danish police procedural movie (*The Cop*), the Swedish political melodrama, set in South America and filmed in English (*The Assignment*), the Tunisian/Dutch effort about the horrors of a tourist takeover of a fishing village (*Soleil des Hyènes*). The daily ration of plot synopses, in English not fractured but

irreparably cracked, hints at the international mish-mash. 'A row and humorous look at life for young people' (Australia). 'A schoolmaster in an isolated small village fight to have a road going to the village. He will realise too late that the road brings no benefit' (Mexico). 'Change of seef (?), of man, of job. Nothing goes right in Pauline's life. She must find a way to control her weight' (France). 'Why George Gimble's dreams become nightmares? Why is his wife loosing reason? Why is the servant falling from 2nd floor?' (Spain).

The specific problem for Cannes, and for the filmgoer loosing reason, is that in trying to take in everything it has increasingly lost the sense of focus—or the stimulus of one conception of cinema set against another. The disappointment this year was really the Directors' Fortnight, where one expects the risks to be found. The main festival always has to bear in mind its paying and decidedly conservative public; and this year did in fact take its small risk in programming Marguerite Duras' *Le Camion*. The audience, predictably, did not take to the piece, and could hardly contain itself at the suggestion that the hypothetical lady under discussion by Mme. Duras and Gérard Depardieu might have come from an asylum. But the risk was worth it: *Le Camion* doesn't excite me as it does Richard Roud, but its mixture of intransigence and hesitancy, the whole tone of voice in which it's advanced, leave a great impact—and the road movie aspects are desolating and beautiful.

For an example of a national cinema seemingly in disarray, one could look at the three Italian entries. The Taviani brothers' *Padre Padrone* attracted a lot of attention with its story (biographical and true) of an illiterate Sardinian boy, Gavino Ledda, snatched from school by his father at the age of six, condemned to brutish solitude among the sheep, but eventually escaping from the trap of the family and deprivation and the barren landscape by way of military service and education. The film has a rough look (it was made for RAI television), a harsh, strident, domineering sense of emptiness, cruel lives, silence and sound. A Strauss waltz plays what might be described as a Kubrick role; in one rare moment two tank drivers converse in Latin as their vehicles career across the landscape. An assertive film, pushing its way towards significance.

A considerable step down comes Ettore Scola's *Una Giornata Particolare*, the day in question being the one in 1938 when all Rome turned out in its Fascist uniforms to greet Hitler. Sophia Loren, a careworn mother of six with a naive hero-worship of the Duce, and Marcello Mastroianni, a radio announcer about to be deported to one of Mussolini's island prisons for homosexuality and lack of sympathy for the regime, are left behind in a vast block of flats as unforgiving as a barracks. Their brief encounter, thoughtfully filmed in colour drained and muted of all bright shades, hovers between awareness of star personality (they 'meet cute', Hollywood-style) and unpersuasive efforts to play against it, in Loren's stylish try at looking

wan and bedraggled and the resolute, unconvincing presentation of superstars as outcasts. The 1938 newsreels and radio broadcasts carry a larger reality.

Both these films may hint at domination by the weight of no longer vital Italian screen conventions, but shine by comparison with Mario Monicelli's grisly **Un Borghese Piccolo Piccolo**. This opens as oafish social satire, with a minor civil servant (Alberto Sordi) crawling and boot-licking to find a secure job for his supine son. Then the son gets in the way of a bank robber's stray bullet, and the bereaved parent goes berserk, himself snatching the killer and keeping him tied up, coshed and hideously blood-spattered, until he duly dies. Mother (Shelley Winters) has meanwhile gone speechless with shock; and no wonder. An ugly film, veering between depressing excesses of black comedy, crude satire and domestic pathos, it is the sort of movie which coming from a director of Monicelli's experience really does suggest a society cracking at the seams.

The Italian films have too much tradition and seemingly nowhere particular to go with it; the Australians, by contrast, seem to be finding conventions as they go, and are distinctly on the way up. Both Mike Thornhill's **The F. J. Holden** and Ken Hannam's **Break of Day** are discussed briefly elsewhere in this issue, and Cannes screenings confirmed Verina Glaessner's impressions. Hannam's period piece is very attractive to look at (there's a particularly taking village cricket match) but dangerously thin on plot; *The F. J. Holden* scores by setting its study of drifting and disaffected youth in the ramshackle respectability of the Sydney suburbs. Slighter but more openly engaging, John Power's **The Picture Show Man** again exploits a setting—and an amiable, untidy performance by John Meillon—in its tale of travelling showmen of the 1920s bringing the silver screen to the back country. Ken Hannam is probably right in suggesting that Australian cinema badly needs writers with a surer sense of structure: both his own film and *The Picture Show Man*, like *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, begin to wobble hazardously at the point where they could consolidate skills of setting and situation. But this rather louche, untidy cinema is unmistakably finding an identity: it looks like itself.

In a festival where so little was really outstanding, it was a case of try, try and try again. István Szabó, for instance, in a very allegorical frame of mind with **Tales of Budapest**. A group of post-war refugees find a derelict tramcar, push it back on its rails, and head for the terminus, growing old along the way as their symbolic conveyance survives fire, flood, squabbles about what colour to paint the tram. There's a temptation to force more specific interpretations than the film wants to yield (is the fire or the flood 1956?), but the final revelation that other trams (other countries? national Communist parties? Hungarian citizens?) are also finding their own way along their own rails to the golden terminus brings matters only to a hazy end. The characters, not surprisingly in these allegorical circumstances, are of the stereotyped kind a Hungarian J. B. Priestley might decide to bring to a city.

Or there was the Carlos Saura film,



Above: *Padre Padrone*. Below: *The Picture Show Man*

Elisa, Vida Mia, made under the sign of Bergman as well as of Buñuel, full of evident accomplishment, but clotted and cantankerous. An elderly man (Fernando Rey) has retired to a remote country farm; his daughter (Geraldine Chaplin) comes to stay and to think about the rocky state of her marriage; father is writing his reminiscences, or she might take him to be writing about her, and the film proceeds to permute their relationships, offering alternative resolutions of life or death, exploring the fashionable theme of role-playing, introducing a dream murder sequence, a symbolic slaughter-house and so on. The first half of the film, setting up the relationship, cutting in shots of the family's past, arousing genuine curiosity through its Bluebeard aspects (just what *is* the father writing?) is an adroit blend of tension and

relaxation; Saura has the narrator's gift, particularly given his two excellent leading players, of making one want to know what comes next. What does come, unhappily, is a rolling mist of pretension, which in suggesting that all alternatives are possible manages to make none of them very interesting.

Claude Goretta is a director who keeps his gaze fixed very directly on his characters, and **La Dentellière**, self-described as a kind of genre painting (not to be confused, of course, with a genre movie) is affecting in precisely the way its director probably intended. *The Invitation*, a more expansive Renoiresque exploration, has been left behind; here a muted sensibility sets the tone. Goretta's leading character, Pomme, is a nice little girl who works in a hairdresser's shop, lives with her protective



mother, and goes off on holiday to Proust's Cabourg with a more worldly friend who is getting over a broken love affair. Goretta deals beautifully with the safe seaside town, the boarding-house, the tennis club, ice-cream at the local café. Pomme takes up with a tense young student, whose naive intellectual snobbery runs head-on against her docility and her untutored reserve. Ditched, she withdraws into illness and a psychiatric ward, where they put her to lace-making. A genre painting indeed; and Isabelle Huppert's performance, self-contained, practical, but with hints of the withdrawal to come, is equal to the director's understanding of the character. He stands back from her, respecting her silences, as though observing a subject for the canvas rather than creating a dramatic character. One's reservation is that a natural short story has been stretched, as so often, by the need to make a feature.

Goretta's literary association actually has little relevance: Pomme is no Albertine. Edgardo Cozarinsky's **Les Apprentis Sorciers** is stuffed with allusions, and part of the pleasure to be derived from a jerkily enterprising film, by no means master of all its layers of tone and performance, lies in pulling out the plums. The characters are mainly South Americans living in Paris, conspirators, would-be conspirators, hangers-on of conspirators, on the track of that evocative object the mystery suitcase. A lady called Madame Umlaut affects a literary salon; Carlos Clarens strolls in, South American novelist and plotter; one character is filming rehearsals of a stage production of *Danton's Death*, a reminder of one kind of revolution; others are playing at their own with kidnappers and silenced revolvers and real blood. Throughout, Paris landmarks and street names (Rue Eugène Sue) are alluringly employed to suggest moods and transitions: the town itself as a historical landscape. Cozarinsky's eclectic intelligence draws on sources from Walter Benjamin through *film noir* to the scene in which Gilbert Adair (SIGHT AND SOUND contributors are rather thick on the ground) arrives at a hotel desk to leave a message for Mr. Issyvoov.

Werner Herzog's **Stroszek**, shown outside the festival, leaves a slight, indefinable sense of unease. Herzog is too patently single-minded, too farouche and solitary, to be suspected of exploiting his characters. Probably he simply feels that in Bruno S., his Kaspar Hauser, he has encountered a memorable image of the changeling in society—matter of fact, unhinged by his own distance from convention, not so much *déraciné* as altogether without roots. In **Stroszek**, Bruno is encountered again in unexpected circumstances, making a journey to America with a prostitute and a wizened old eccentric, and finally riding up a mountain to shoot himself when life again deals him the losing hand he expected. The uneasiness is in Herzog's use of Bruno a second time for a similar purpose, Bruno in a lumber-jacket perhaps devaluing the force of Bruno as Kaspar. The improbable trio establish themselves in a Wisconsin prairie village, in a prefabricated house which first arrives massively on wheels and is later repossessed, by a silk-smooth salesman, when they fail to keep up the payments. Herzog seems

haunted by the empty landscape, mesmerised by the mechanised vulgarity, and intrigued by the distancing effect of the language differences, which strike almost Godardian echoes. **Stroszek** is one to see again.

So, emphatically, is Hans Jürgen Syberberg's **Hitler**, an adventure described in the press handout as designed to run three hours and by Syberberg himself as a six-hour film in the making. In any case, all that is at present ready is about an hour of extracts—powerfully suggestive and intriguing, but not enough to indicate how Syberberg can surmount the more formidable hurdles. The whole film is being made in the studio, and will be 'structured along the lines of a series of extended monologues, with a huge jump to the show business element, a kind of admixture of Oktoberfest, circus and country fair.' The extracts give us one such monologue, from a man setting up his picnic lunch in the garden of the Eagle's Nest and reminiscing ingratiatingly and knowingly about Hitler at home, Hitler playing with his dogs; and there is a sequence in which Goering, Goebbels and the rest of that dreadful court are represented by puppets, standing upright in little boxes while smoke fumes around them and their manipulators speak for them.

We are to see 'Hitler as orator, as child, posing as Hamlet, as Napoleon, as Caligari, Hitler as jack-in-the-box, as Charlie Chaplin's *Great Dictator*, as house painter. . . . Part, if not even most, of Syberberg's intention is to confront 'the Hitler in us', the sheer attraction of Hitler ('the kid in the fairy tale who got the three wishes'), and the mastery of showmanship and myth-making powers. Let Hitler, he says, 'have his chance to be elected again, to say the things he said before, to want again what he wanted, and which I think was evil. I think we all do today. And at the end we will realise all too well why it was we elected him.' Hitler as the stuff that dreams are made of: if Syberberg can pull it off, and on his track record he is evidently one of the few who could, a remarkable film is in the making.

Finally, and briefly, two of the political documentaries. Peter Watkins is now in Denmark, where he has made **Evening Land**, another of his admonitory films in television style, in which Danish workers go on strike when they learn that their shipyards are to be kept in work building nuclear submarines; visiting NATO spokesmen deny any sinister purpose; a Danish politician is kidnapped by extremists; and the police riot squads mass in the streets.

'The Huntsmen'



Watkins pioneered the techniques now so fashionable in TV's ubiquitous drama/documentary reconstructions, and stylistically he has been rather outpaced, though his films still retain their particularly doom-laden and apprehensive charge and their dour logic. One of the more awkward customers on the contemporary film-making scene, Watkins has this time reportedly annoyed the Danes by his cold eye; but it's still an indictment of British cinema and television that they can find nothing to bring this wandering film-maker home. In quite another style of political film, **Chinois, encore un effort pour être révolutionnaires** demands a mention. Made by René Vienet and others, this is a two-hour compilation setting out to demonstrate how Chairman Mao, 'the most libertarian of the founders of the Chinese Communist Party,' became 'the sinister potentate of the most totalitarian rule the world has ever known.' Much of the material is fascinating, if by no means always too plainly identified for the historical footage; judgment on its veracity and argument should more safely await an English version. The intriguing thing was that the film was shown in the Directors' Fortnight, and that it seemed to pass virtually without comment. Three or four years ago, the French Maoists would have been on the warpath.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

This was the year that the official competition at Cannes co-opted the favourite directors of the side events. Marguerite Duras, Theodor Angelopoulos and Wim Wenders made it into the main event (Wenders actually for the second time), and the result was the enrichment of the official festival and—since there are only so many films to go round—the impoverishment of the 'counter-festival'. But both the Directors' Fortnight and the Critics' Week began well, the first with Benoît Jacquot's **Les Enfants du Placard** (*Children in a Closet*) and the second with a vastly entertaining Algerian film called **Omar Gatlato** (which means literally *Omar It-Kills-Him*, with It referring to his sex organ), the story of the downfall of a Mediterranean would-be macho. Actually, Omar is something of a timid soul who finds it impossible to live up to his self-imposed ideal of virility.

Social comment is not entirely absent from the film: part of this bachelor's problem comes from the fact that he is obliged to live with his enormous family in an overcrowded flat. But the days of *The Battle of Algiers* seem far away, even if from time to time some of the older men reminisce like veterans of the Revolution about the Great Days. Omar's main problem is getting cassettes for his recorder so that he can record the songs from the Indian films he loves so much. The film is narrated in the first person, and much of one's enjoyment depends on the leading actor, Boualem Benani: I thought he was terrific. Altogether this first feature, directed by Merzak Allouache, is just the kind of film that the Critics' Week was created to show-case.

Benoît Jacquot's film is a far more austere enterprise; this is Jacquot's second film, and its story could be described as the *Enfants Terribles* Grow Up. Incestuous

longings exist between Nicolas (Lou Castel) and Juliette (Brigitte Fossey), he a ne'er do well, sponging on his friends, leaving restaurants and hotels without paying the bill, and she a more sensible girl who has married a plausible businessman type (Jean Sorel). So sensible is she that she tries to make love with her brother by proxy—she fixes him up with her best girl friend. It doesn't work. But the psychological theme of the film is doubled by a social one: Juliette's husband and her father are both mixed up in a scheme for the illegal smuggling of African workers into France. And the connection between the two aspects of the film is pointed by showing Nicolas watching a bit from a film called *Les Contrabandiers de Moonfleet*, which is of course the French title of Fritz Lang's *Moonfleet*. We also learn that Nicolas is considered responsible by his father for his mother's suicide (she hanged herself), and one can assume that we are meant to see a sort of transference from Nicolas' guilt over his (unwitting) 'murder' of his mother to an excessive fondness for his sister.

If this sounds far-fetched, don't forget that Jacquot's first film (*L'Assassin Musicien*, 1974) was written up enthusiastically in *Le Monde* by the great French psychoanalyst Dr. Lacan himself. And it is not an accident that the shot of the mother hanging from the chandelier in this film is doubled by the shot of the hanged man which we see in the extract from *Moonfleet*. All this aside, the film is fascinating on the simple plot level, largely because of the compelling yet minimal performances of the principals. Jacquot may be a disciple of Bresson (and it shows in the actors' delivery of the dialogue), but he does not share the master's preference for non-professionals. And the hot-house atmosphere of the brother-sister relationship is rhymed with the tropical heat of Paris in August—last August, the hottest of the century. He makes the Luxembourg Gardens look almost African.

Bresson's latest film, *Le Diable, Probablement*, was to have ended the Directors' Fortnight in a burst of glory; alas, the screening was cancelled by Bresson because 'the print wasn't yet properly graded'. Perhaps. In any case, this left the Quinzaine a little high and dry, for the other films were not as distinguished as in the past. Again, because what could have been the highlights were snaffled by the main event. There was another disappointment in the last few days of the festival: the screening of Bellocchio's *The Seagull* was stopped after twenty minutes by the director because the projection equipment was inadequate. So we never even managed to see Laura Betti as the actress-mother, and that surely would have been a treat.

I cannot say that I was disappointed by the new Angelopoulos film, *The Huntsmen*, because I have never been an admirer of his. But even those who thought so highly of *The Travelling Players* found this new film something of a trial. Although much shorter, it seemed twice as long because the pace was insufferably and dictatorially slow. The idea of the film was similar: to recount the recent history of Greece (this time the civil war of the 40s and its aftermath in the 50s) through the device of an inquest over the body of a partisan that has been discovered, still bleeding, twenty years after



Dennis Hopper in 'Der Amerikanische Freund'

his death. The French critics remain loyal to Angelopoulos, but the Anglo-Saxons mostly had to admit they had been bored to distraction.

My disappointment came from the fact that, like the Goretta and the Duras pictures, the new film by Wim Wenders, *Der Amerikanische Freund*, received no official recognition: it was totally absent from the prize list. And yet this was Wenders' most accessible, most entertaining movie—partly because he decided to use a novel as a thread to hang the film on, Patricia Highsmith's *Ripley's Game*. I have not read any of her novels, but this one seems to bear some resemblance to *Strangers on a Train*: Jonathan, an ailing picture-framer, is talked into committing a murder (and then another) by Ripley. As in *Strangers on a Train*, he will not be caught because he has no motive. The sick side of this plot—which Ripley (Dennis Hopper) comes to regret—is that it depends on convincing Jonathan (Bruno Ganz) that his latent leukaemia has suddenly entered a terminal phase, and the money he will get for committing the murder will be for his widow-to-be and their child.

Like most of Wenders' films, this one is also about a friendship between two men (in this case Ripley and Jonathan), and to accomplish this he has had to make both characters more sympathetic than they apparently are in the original novel. In this respect the film resembles *Kings of the Road*; it also resembles that film in that the sub-text is movie-making itself. There are many kinetic gadgets in evidence, including a praxinoscope, and several roles are played by film directors. Dennis Hopper, of course, but also Nicholas Ray, Sam Fuller and Gérard Blain, who play the three swindlers. As Wenders said, not only are film directors the only swindlers he really knows, but also Ray and Fuller brought to their roles the weight of their own films, their own investigations of the underworld.

Again, as with all Wenders' films, this is a documentary: three cities are sharply evoked, Hamburg, New York and Paris. The first murder, which takes place in

the Métro, is one of the high-spots of the film, particularly in the way in which we see Jonathan make his getaway through the closed-circuit television screens in the control room of the Défense Métro station. At first we think that these screens are being watched by policemen and that he will be caught, but we soon realise that no one is looking at these supposed security checks, and that this is simply an economical and Langian way of showing the getaway (remember the TV screens in *Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse*?). Characteristically, Wenders shoots most of the Paris scenes in the most hideous part of the city, the garish new skyscrapers west of the Eiffel Tower which go by the grandiose name of 'Fronts de Seine'. And in one amazing telephoto shot he makes us actually see a character waving a handkerchief half a mile away on the other side of the river. Robby Müller was once again the cameraman, only this time he used a new kind of Eastman Colour negative, giving the film a visual toughness which almost approaches garishness.

Just as Marguerite Duras' *Le Camion* won over people who had previously resisted her films, so *The American Friend* won a lot of converts to Wenders. One might be tempted to say that the film is inferior to *Kings of the Road* simply because it is faster moving and more enjoyable. But I am not entirely certain that this understandable reaction (it was mine, immediately after seeing the film) is correct. Maybe the 'dilution' caused by the use of foreign material, i.e. the Highsmith novel, only helped to bring out what Wenders is essentially getting at in his films. In any case, coming as it did on the last night of a festival which was a pretty good one (there was also Robert Altman's remarkable *Three Women*, about which I haven't written as it should be opening soon in London, as well as Agnès Varda's *L'Une Chante, l'Autre Pas* and *Le Camion*, about which I have written elsewhere in this issue), it certainly sent one away from Cannes feeling that the cinema is not dead yet. If only the jury had been worthy of the films...

RICHARD ROUD

In The Picture

Australia

As of this summer, the Australian film boom was under way with an energy which seemed if anything sharpened by an awareness of the industry's ultimate financial precariousness. Private investors are still wary and rely to a large degree on the incentive offered by the public sector; U.S. investment, despite prayers, remains minimal; and it is felt that an enterprise still essentially structured on cottage-industry lines could not effectively withstand a government cutback. The stakes of course, more than ever, are the possibilities both of scooping the still substantial local pool and of breaking into the increasingly essential international market.

Joseph Losey was scouting locations for the long-discussed screen version of Patrick White's *Voss*—a project greeted with enthusiasm from the press and some scepticism from those in the business. Patrick White himself was working on a screenplay adaptation of his short story *The Night of the Prowler*. And there are several projects based on the works of Henry Handel Richardson waiting in the wings. One didn't have to be over-cautious to feel some doubts about the prospect of a major slice of Aust. Lit. finding its way to the screen.

But whatever may be felt about the situation as a whole, the Australian industry is managing to keep three directors of proven talent in business. Peter Weir is probably the most idiosyncratic of these, and his third feature film, *The Last Wave*, is being 50 per cent funded by United Artists, with a further contribution from the South Australia Film Corporation. 'It's a suspense tale,' Weir says, 'a quest by one person for a secret which leads him deeper and deeper into larger issues. It's also about dreams, about a white man's dreams and how an aboriginal might interpret them: two dream worlds coming together. It begins with a lawyer who becomes involved with what looks like an open and shut case involving urban aboriginal people: a fight that results in manslaughter. But he comes to believe that at the heart of it there is a tribal secret, and a secret important to us all. On the

one hand the lawyer begins to discover an impossible situation, and on the other the aboriginals become interested in him because he has a kind of psychic flaw. He has trouble sleeping, and dreams... and his dreams begin to touch on the very secret areas for which they have killed... The story also involves a tidal wave, but obviously with a film on this scale we can't do it very spectacularly, so that too is rather dreamlike.'

Weir wrote the script with Tony Morphet, a television writer, and Petru Popescu, a Rumanian novelist now living in Los Angeles. The script received rather negative reactions in Australia: 'there's a tension now about what will go here.' Russell Boyd, from *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, is the cinematographer, Richard Chamberlain plays the lawyer, and aboriginal people from Groote Island take the parts of the survivors of a near-extinct tribe. Weir's next project will be the hallowed Australian subject of Gallipoli. It will not, he stresses, be an epic. 'There is a phrase I remember from school about Anzac Day which absolutely fascinated me: "they paid the supreme sacrifice". I could never understand what it meant. "Sacrifice" for me implied a kind of pagan ritual; "pay" implied debt. I want to show someone who genuinely did "pay the supreme sacrifice", and believed that he was.'

Mike Thornhill's *Between Wars* was seized on (favourably) by foreign critics for its un-Australian characteristics. Thornhill disagrees. 'I think it is about repressive people who don't face up to things and who, though basically decent, tend to avoid conflict. I think that's very Australian.' His new film, *The F. J. Holden*, was made on a meagre budget of 310,000 Australian dollars, a budget pushed through before devaluation and recent price rises. 'Terry Larsen wrote the original script as a kind of poetic documentary. It was structurally all over the shop, but the style of the dialogue and characters attracted me. We worked together on a final draft and some 30 per cent of the dialogue is ad-libbed by the mainly non-professional cast.'

It's a direct and unselfconscious subject, and markedly different

from the mainstream of films currently being produced in Australia. 'For one thing,' Mike Thornhill points out, 'it is contemporary and urban. It is basically a value-free story about working-class kids in the suburbs of Sydney, about their relationships with each other and with their parents. The distributors are selling it along the lines of *American Graffiti* (which I've avoided seeing) because it centres on a kid with a car [the eponymous F. J. Holden, a 1950s model] and a couple of drag race sequences that aren't about drag racing. It is, if I can be immodest, elegantly simple.' It seems, I suggest, a long way from *Between Wars*. 'It is. The people who were delighted with that film for being tasteful and intelligent will be in for a shock. This is un-tasteful and intelligent.'

For Ken Hannam, 'flattered and somewhat bemused' by the comparisons with Hawks and Ford elicited by his first feature, *Sunday Too Far Away*, the main problem about working in an Australian context is the lack of experienced writers. This, he suggests, can result in a certain fatal softness of approach. 'I have to work from the inside out. I see myself as a translator of what the writer has written. I have to find myself through the script so that I can make the film both on my own terms and those of the writer.' *Break of Day*, his most recent film, is 'a very slight work', a gentle love story between a bohemian artist and the proprietor of a small-town newspaper in Victoria in 1920. 'Its slightness meant that it had to have good performances and a strong visual sense. Television, in which I have had a long career, tends to rob one of one's eye. *Break of Day* seemed an opportunity to prove that I'd not lost it. *Sunday Too Far Away* had to have a very no nonsense approach. The country had to be shown as the men saw it, and to

them there was no beauty in it. I fought continually to keep that austerity.'

When I spoke to Ken Hannam he was just going into production on *Summerfield*, which is being written by Cliff Green (from *Picnic at Hanging Rock*). 'We are now on our sixth draft,' Hannam confesses with some satisfaction. *Summerfield* is a mystery thriller. 'We are filming at Western Port Bay, which is very much like Hampshire, low-lying tidal country that looks bleak on a grey day and beautiful in the sun. We're filming on a rather strange island connected to the mainland by a humpbacked bridge. The plot concerns a young teacher (played by Nick Tate) who comes to take over a one-teacher school after his predecessor has disappeared. He becomes very interested in the previous teacher, obsessed to the point where he actually brings on a tragedy in the town. He starts to play amateur detective and he's not very good at it, and triggers off a chain of events that leaves him with a load of guilt.'

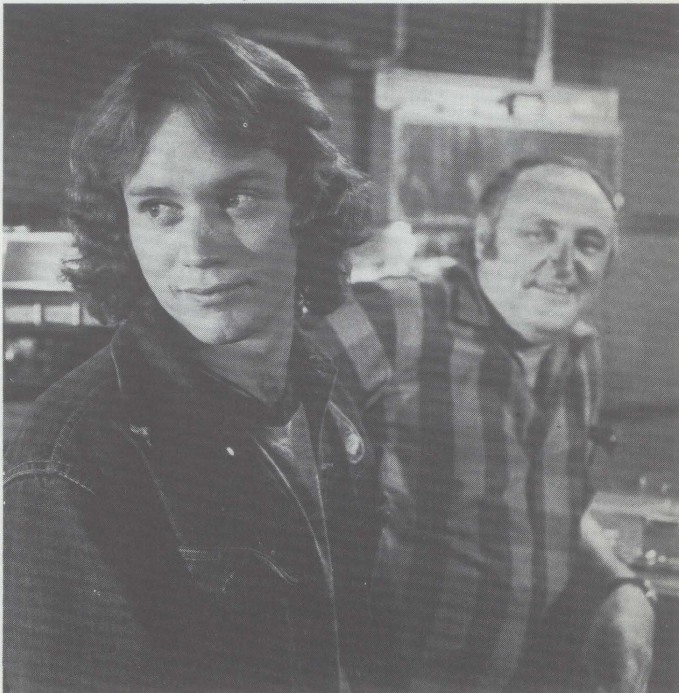
VERINA GLAESSNER

Annan and the Cinema

Elsewhere in this issue, we publish a report on the Annan Report. One aspect not covered there, because in the general context of the Annan Committee's concerns it occupies a relatively minor place, is that of the relationship of broadcasting and the film industry. Among the submissions to Annan there were many well-aided suggestions, of varying ingenuity, about ways in which television might come to the aid of an ailing cinema. In three or four reasoned pages, the Report assembles these arguments, spruces them up into neat and tidy form, and on the whole rejects them.

The stock pile of old feature

Mike Thornhill's 'The F. J. Holden'





Jean-Louis Comolli's 'La Cecilia'

films which has helped to sustain television is now largely used up. 'Nor is the stock being replenished,' notes the Report. 'The modern cinema industry has had to produce films designed to entice people out of their homes and away from their television sets. It has done so generally by producing lavish blockbusters and by producing films depicting violence and sex to a degree which would not be acceptable, and is therefore not shown, on the domestic television set.'

This may seem a rather large generalisation. The Report follows it by arguing that once video cassettes offer alternative distribution methods, films will no longer provide cheap programming for television. Consequently, 'the BBC and ITV will come to rely for the bulk of their bought-in material, not on cinema films, but on films made specially for television often originally intended for American viewers. Some of these programmes are excellent, but many are footling and could be replaced by British productions at greater expense but otherwise without any loss to the quality of the service.'

Where are the British productions to come from? The Report acknowledges that 'some way of providing pre-production finance will be necessary.' And it summarises the suggestions made to the Committee: a levy on all cinema films shown on television; more money to be paid by television for the features it transmits; the diverting into the film industry of some part of the levy paid to the Treasury by the ITV companies; some finance for feature production to be provided by the television organisations, as proposed by the Prime Minister's Working Party on the Film Industry.

'What then,' asks Annan, 'should be the financial relationship

between films and television? There was running through much of the evidence we received... an understandable, but we believe wrong-headed, feeling that television, having stolen the mass audience from the cinema, should now be required to allow the film industry a share of the profits of the television industry's popularity. It was argued that since some of television's popularity is based on the televising of cinema films, and since television shares some of the same creative skills and creative artists, then, like an aged parent, the film industry has a right to look to television to support it in its old age.'

The Report steers the aged parent away from its affluent young relations and towards social security. 'We do not believe such a relationship between the film and television industries would ensure the rejuvenation of the British film production industry. Nor would it be in the interests of either the cinema-going public or the television audience.' The Committee suggests that questions such as the length of time before cinema features can be shown on television (five years or three years), or the sums to be paid for television rights, are matters for negotiation between the parties involved rather than for any statutory provision. And, 'if the government wishes to make payments to the film industry, we believe the correct criterion is the Government's assessment of the industry's need when judged against other priorities for expenditure, and not the size of payments by the ITV companies to the Treasury through the levy, which are irrelevant to a subsidy for the film industry.'

'If television is not to make payments to the film industry as a form of blood money,' the Report continues, 'should any payments be made at all? We believe the

broadcasting organisations will want to do so. They will want to do so, not to prop up an ailing industry, but in order themselves to benefit from the output of the creative talents engaged in film making... But... we would not wish the prospect of a reduced levy to encourage more investment in feature film making than would be desirable either for the television programme making responsibilities of the companies or for those employed in broadcasting.'

The question remains: how can television 'benefit from the output of the creative talents' if those talents are stymied by a moribund industry? It is well over a year since the Prime Minister's Working Party, chaired by Sir John Terry, produced its report. Plans for the British Film Authority and for new legislation remain in abeyance until Sir Harold Wilson's committee takes matters a stage further. And there has been a long hiatus until the recent announcement of the committee membership. Meanwhile, the morale of the film industry declines, and promising film-makers see no future for themselves in this country. Throughout 1976, only four feature films and two television series were shot at Pinewood, the flagship film studio.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

La Cecilia

In that Jean-Louis Comolli is both a Marxist and a former editor of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, it is hardly surprising that his first feature should be an intelligent piece of political cinema. But what makes *La Cecilia* (The Other Cinema) unusual is the success with which it breaks away from the tradition of emotive propagandist film-making such as that for which Goebbels so admired

Eisenstein. The film contains no 'message', no easy conclusions, but a set of propositions, a starting point for discussion.

When I spoke with Comolli, he was adamant about the importance of such an approach. 'I think that's the film-maker's job, to take questions which confront him, or confront other people, and pose them in such a way that as many people as possible can appropriate them to themselves. I think one must provide the spectator with elements of knowledge, of rationality—of emotion also—and that from these elements he must pose questions and draw conclusions in relation to his own experience. But one doesn't have the right to do it for him.'

The film concerns the colony of La Cecilia, which was set up in 1890 after the Italian anarchist theorist Giovanni Rossi was given a grant of land by the emperor of Brazil. Comolli first learnt about the colony in 1971 from a reference in an Italian anarchist song; searching for further information, he found the two books written by Rossi about La Cecilia. These became the primary historical source for the script which Comolli wrote in conjunction with Marianne de Vettimo and Eduardo de Gregorio. What results is a film about the relationship between political theory and practice. Rossi drew heavily upon Charles Fourier's thesis that social organisation should be based not upon hierarchical authority but upon pleasure and desire. Many of the conflicts depicted in *La Cecilia* spring from the fact that Rossi saw the colony as a kind of laboratory experiment to prove the validity of these ideas and was too immersed in theory to realise that the other colonists were there to make practical changes. 'Their basic idea was to try to find a form of organisation which would spring from each person's own desires. They did not really succeed in finding the formula, but the experiment nevertheless had the merit of posing this problem in a very vivid way.'

Comolli has said that *La Cecilia* is aimed at the Left, that it is a film about problems of political organisation for those actively involved in such organisation. As such, it holds up a mirror that is by no means always flattering. For example, when the original colonists are joined by a number of peasant families a major split develops.

'They imagine that the confrontation with their own experience will be enough to make the families see where their best interest lies, where is truth, where is justice, and then they'll destroy the old structure to take part in the new one. But that's not how it works; it's always after a difficult, complex effort that the possibility of such a transformation arises. It's an old problem, and one which I think you find within all political currents, that certain militants, at all levels of the revolutionary hierarchy, are convinced that their ideas are so

good, so right that they only have to be shown and the fact of showing them will convince people. But of course that only works if people obey, not if they think for themselves.'

Comolli probably has a better right than most to talk about the difference between obeying and thinking for oneself, in that he had the courage, when shooting *La Cecilia*, to try to get away from the hierarchical method of organisation which is the basis of most film production: 'Within the limitations imposed by economic factors, we tried to break away from this structure, and one of the most important aspects was the effect on what went on between the actors and the director. Normally, one asks actors to wear blinkers, to see only that small bit of the film which is their own character. We tried to break that by uniting the actors on a political basis. We discussed the film politically, we discussed the characters politically. And I asked them to think not just about their own characters but about the whole network of relationships in the film.'

'Suddenly I was no longer alone against an all-powerful production apparatus; I found myself surrounded by all the actors and a lot of the technicians. And we could then make changes that proved decisive. For example, the actors started arriving on set even when they weren't in the scene themselves, because they felt the need to know how the work was going. So we could improvise freely—about a third of the film was improvised—because if, say, we were discussing a scene with two people, and we decided to turn it into a group scene, then we could just go ahead because everybody was there. It's less secure as a way of working, but that's how you get to what's important.'

Comolli maintains, however, that the film is very traditional in construction: 'There is a section which presents the characters, a section which starts setting the contradictions in place and then the development of all the contradictions until they erupt. It's a classical type of construction, and I used it to allow the spectator to follow this whole evolution without being manipulated. That is, for me, what is fundamental in the style, the "mode of writing" of the cinema: the place given to the spectator. Do you treat him as someone to be taken in, or as someone who is capable of feeling but also of thinking, and to whom one can therefore show things without trickery or deception?'

ALLAN T. SUTHERLAND

Cartagena Festival

This year's Cartagena Festival (the seventeenth) was one of those occasions when critics find themselves writing more in terms of what was happening round about than of the actual screenings. But apart from first hand confirmation that there has indeed been a

drought of crisis proportions in Colombia, it is not all that interesting to be told how many days there was no water in the hotels, or what life is like in a Caribbean city almost totally deprived of electricity after dark. The only bearing this had on the festival itself was the extent to which such mishaps cut down personal participation by North Americans almost to nothing. After all, if not only can you not drink the water, you cannot even find it . . .

For those who braved such traumas, the festival was a chaotic but fitfully illuminating experience, from its opening première, *Il Corsaro Nero*, a limping swash-buckler by Sergio Sollima which was still an inspired choice for the circumstances. It was made entirely in and around Cartagena, using its Spanish Colonial fortresses and mansions to the full, and every time a bit player hove recognisably into view there was a roar of gleeful recognition from the audience—thereby demonstrating simultaneously that Cartagena is a spectacular location for foreign film-makers and that the festival itself is a very local, almost a family affair.

The Latin American features in competition were something of a disappointment, which to some extent was the fault of the latest batch of squabbles among the states concerned. At the last minute Argentina failed to participate; and though rumour had it that emigré Brazilian film-makers were trickling home and starting to make interesting films, no tangible evidence was present at the festival, where Brazilian participation was confined to some vague responsibility for *Yo Creo*, a *Mondo Cane* type of compilation about curiosities of religion around the world. Another such, *La Magia*, wore its artistic preten-

sions firmly if not convincingly on its sleeve; the making of such features seems to be a new trend in Latin America, though not one to be encouraged.

As for the fiction features, and a number of fiction shorts by Colombian and Venezuelan directors eager to make the transition to features, the main thing they had in common was a pervasive atmosphere of violence. Not, for the most part, violence cultivated in a sadistic fashion, but violence alarmingly accepted as a normal part of life. And accepted with cheerful indifference by local audiences: they did not understand Andy Warhol's *Bad*, because they had no sense of a taboo being violated and therefore missed most of the film's humour; they laughed uproariously at much of *Salò*. Films from nearer home were received in a very similar spirit, and there was a big popular success for the Mexican *El Apando* (director: Felipe Cazals), an unremittently, unrewardingly gross prison comedy-drama with scenes of violence and bloodshed dropped in every few minutes like numbers in a musical.

The Venezuelan entry, *Cancio mansa para un pueblo bravo*, a first film by a very young director, Giancarlo Carrer, did help to uphold last year's hopes for a vigorous new cinema in this part of Latin America. Fundamentally it is a fairly routine story of a country innocent's unfortunate experiences in the big city, robbed, beaten up and led into a life of crime. But it is perceptively acted, inventively directed, and makes the most of its exotic Caracas setting without falling into the irrelevant picturesque. Like Mauricio Walerstein last year, Carrer seems a new talent from Venezuela worth keeping an eye on.

There were, among the rest,

Francis Coppola directing his Vietnam film, 'Apocalypse Now'



three features of some quality. The Bolivian *Pueblo Chico* is a naive but agreeable story of a young school-teacher from the landowning classes who tries to do something for the Indian peasants and is disillusioned; its main oddity is that it is half in Quechua with Spanish subtitles. The Mexican *Maten al Leon*, adapted by Jose Estrada from a rather distinguished novel by Jorge Ibaranguencia, evokes the 1920s beautifully through its sets and costumes and looks, thanks to Figueroa, spectacular, but is overall rather limp and listless. The Cuban entry, Humberto Solas' *Cantata de Chile*, at least places itself decisively from the start in a different and superior category. Not too easy to like, with its savagery and its self-consciously monumental posturings, somewhere between Stalinist official art and *Adalen 31*, it nevertheless makes an authoritative stylistic gesture. Its tribute to the slaughtered strikers in the 1907 massacre at Iquique ranges backwards and forwards in time and is built to music in a way that recalls Janesó's otherwise very different *The Confrontation*. In the Cuban cinema, at least, good things may still happen.

JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR

Turkish Troubles

'The future of the Turkish film industry depends on the future of Turkey itself,' said one of the country's best young directors. 'It all comes down to politics, what kind of government we have. We may not survive the wrong kind of regime.' On the face of it, this looks like an overstatement: just a few years ago Turkey was the third largest film-making country in the world. In 1972, the industry produced 298 feature

films which played to a domestic audience of 100 million. Statistics were impressive in all respects: 1,500 indoor cinemas, 1,700 open-air, a good 2,000 artists and technicians working at Mack Sennett pace (average shooting time: five days). If the industry could survive the techniques (the music for a full-length film was expected to be dubbed in less than an hour; most stars worked on two films simultaneously), it could surely survive anything.

But times have changed all that. Today, 60 per cent of the Turkish film audience has been lost to TV; nearly half the cinemas have either closed or are showing foreign imports only; and the ranks of the industry's once frenetic craftsmen have been decimated by unemployment and industrial strife—the workers at the Acar Studio, Turkey's largest, have been on strike for over a year. The troubles have been compounded by problems of censorship, film law, and the general polarisation of left and right. Result: in 1976 Turkey produced only 120 films, most of them low-budget, soft-core sex movies.

If it were simply a question of economics, the future would not look quite so difficult. Audiences can be weaned away from TV, the dynamics of a developing country and a swiftly rising middle-class could lead to a demand for better films. The talent and the potential are there. Between 1970 and 1973, for example, Turkish films were sold to 18 foreign countries, earning 10 million Turkish lira in hard currency. But these assets are not being exploited now and probably will not be until the country puts its house in order. With an election imminent at the time of writing, left and right have been fighting hard for power, and not just figuratively. Nearly 200 have been killed in politically motivated violence during the last two years.

The political tension made itself felt at the recent (and first) Istanbul International Film Festival, sponsored by the Filmsan Foundation, 'the only official art organisation in Turkey', according to its secretary-general, Umit Utku. A combination of film union and production house, the Filmsan Foundation worked hard to put together a creditable festival, with entries from 15 countries, including such films as *The Message*, Lattuada's *Heart of a Dog* and the Polish *Gamblers*. Thanks to impressive government support, the Foundation was able to invite numerous foreign directors and actors, giving Turkey's film professionals a rare chance to meet their counterparts and make the contacts they need. Politics intervened when many filmmakers decided to boycott the festival as a right-wing promotion.

Politics have always been a factor in the Turkish film industry. In 1936 a censorship regulation bill was passed which was almost an exact copy of Mussolini's censorship law. That law is still on the books; and censorship

committees, comprised of civil servants and politicians, lay heavy hands on both scripts and finished films. At times an appeal to the Supreme Court has overturned a censor's ruling, but even that escape hatch may be closed if the new censorship bill recently presented to parliament is put into effect. As Biltin Toker, Turkey's most astute film critic, said, 'On the face of it the bill looks more liberal, but actually it tightens the censors' controls by leaving everything to their discretion.' The censors frown on criticism of any authority figure—from politician to teacher or even father.

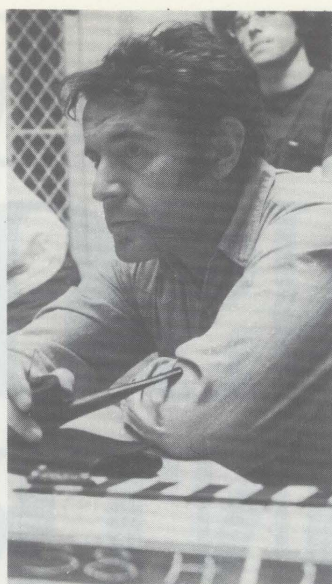
While the state does not directly control the film industry, it does control the television stations. This too is part of the crisis, because if the government decides to allow Turkish TV to make its own feature films, the industry will have no means of competing. But many film workers believed that a Social-Democratic election victory would mean protection for the industry by means of a system of subsidies. The Social-Democrats, they say, did support the industry last time the party was in power. Others insist that the future lies with the conservatives, who did back the Istanbul festival in an effort to attract foreign film companies and buyers. This argument sees co-production as the panacea, with the currency earned abroad eventually being ploughed back into domestic production.

In any case, it is hard to believe that the state will turn its back completely on the film industry. Commitments have already been made. Last year, for example, saw the launching of a three-year university programme in professional film techniques, in a new building with well-equipped studios, labs and cutting-rooms. The new generation of filmmakers and enthusiasts also has access to the state-supported film archives. Given a reasonably stable political future, Turkish film-makers will no longer have to learn their craft on the run.

WILLARD MANUS

Sentimental Journey

Contradictions of time and place have recently been gathering round the figure of Milos Forman. Having established his skills as a local satirist, one of the directors of the Czech 'New Wave' who briefly found an opportunity for looking askance at their society, Forman transplanted those skills intact to America, where human behaviour soon proved to be basically different but the same. (The montage of audition scenes that prefaces *Taking Off* is in fact a replay from his first film, a short called *Competition*, which recorded the efforts of young hopefuls who came to audition at a musical theatre in Prague.) But if this graceful transition suggested that the social satirist might be taking on overtones of the universal, Forman's recent projects have begun moving towards a special



Milos Forman

groove of their own. He is currently engaged in an adaptation of *Hair*, which he describes as a 'sentimental journey, a very nostalgic trip', and which will be only his second feature made entirely in the 70s but set, like *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, in the 60s.

The stage production of *Hair* was 'the first thing I met when I arrived in America in 1967. I didn't even understand the lyrics very well at that time. My English was very poor. But there was something very attractive to me. I'm not planning to photograph the stage; we're trying to shoot everything on location, as little as possible in the studio. We're now in the process of seeking for the style, the choreography, the musical numbers—trying to find ourselves in it. We put together a story, a very simple plot, and I don't know exactly what it means.'

Forman's approach still suggests the outsider not quite sure of the accuracy of his perceptions, though he seems as diligent in his research as he is shy of analysing the results. Talking of acting, and in particular his way of working with the actors on *Cuckoo's Nest*, Forman declares his dislike of digging too deep for motivation. 'When you see the actor hit the nerve right on, then it is best not to intellectualise too much, because you can do a great deal of damage. The characters become transparent and predictable and lose a certain mystery. What is great about MacMurphy's character is his unpredictability, you don't see through him. Is he really sane or insane—you don't know.' A disturbing aspect of this ambiguity, as it turned out, was that the sentimental endorsement of MacMurphy's rebellion skated over some of the more dangerous areas of his personality. 'I think it's true of any altruism that it's based on very egotistical motives. Of course he wants certain rights just for himself. When you go case by case, what he's fighting for, it's not important if he's right or wrong. The main drama is beyond his consciousness—the drama of a modern society which is creating

institutions to serve us. But it's the nature of an institution to turn into something which behaves as if it owns us.'

One positive result of this research has been the small discoveries which have almost become the subject of Forman's films. On *Taking Off*, 'when I started to talk to a lot of kids and parents, I suddenly found out that I was more touched by the parents. Because they were really emotional, really in panic. Something which was already dead was suddenly revived. The kids I saw were often very boring.' And, almost inevitably it seems, the news story which inspired *Taking Off* ('one day, in 1967, they found a young girl and a guy murdered in a cellar on the lower East Side, which was sort of hippy territory, and that was the first bad scene in so-called hippy life') took Forman through Updike and Cheever country ('Friday evening she always went home and behaved as a good student, an innocent girl; then on Mondays, the girl left, and the father had a mistress somewhere and the mother had a lover; they all had their secret lives') back to his origins. 'The funny thing was that I concentrated on this story because it was very similar to a story of a friend of mine in Prague whose daughter disappeared one day.'

In the fallow period between *Taking Off* and *Cuckoo's Nest*, Forman's further investigations into America have turned up a number of unrealised projects which suggest some possible lines of advance from period pieces for the recent past. One was an adaptation of Thomas Berger's novel *Vital Parts*. 'I worked on a screenplay with the author; but somehow we didn't find the end, I don't know exactly why. The reality which he was using as part of the fiction, cryogenics, is amazing. I met these guys who are actually doing it in a garage on Long Island; they have frozen five or six bodies. The idea is that if the body is frozen within seven minutes of death—so practically no chemical reaction will begin—you are absolutely intact, and you can stay in that condition for hundreds of years until the moment when they find a cure for the disease which killed you.'

'These people who are doing it—one is a former lawyer who looks like Peter Lorre, and one is an unpublished writer who really believes that he is not ever going to die. The story of their first body was unbelievable, because they were so disorganised that when they arrived with the truck, right at the moment when the man was practically dying, they found that they had forgotten the ice. So they started to run, and they robbed all the neighbours' fridges; they stopped an ice cream truck and just took all the ice. They were very willing to talk about everything, they were very proud of their activity. I was thinking of using them as actors, because they were incredible types.'

RICHARD COMBS

1930s Newsreels: CENSORSHIP & CONTROVERSY

Tony Aldgate

'The content of the newsreels was determined mainly by the passing fads and fancies of the time,' Sir Arthur Elton commented in 1955. Speaking as he did just before the beginning of a decade which saw the eventual demise of all but one of the leading British cinema newsreels, his statement has served since to summarise the feelings of a whole generation of commentators. But Elton's criticism of newsreel content was mild compared with some of the statements made by critics during the 30s, the heyday of the cinema newsreel.

Terry Ramsaye, for instance, said in 1934 of the American product: 'The newsreel is not a purveyor of news and is never likely to become one.' By 1937 John Grierson had come to a similar conclusion about the British counterpart: 'From the beginning we have had newsreels, but dim records they seem now of only the evanescent and the essentially unreal, reflecting hardly anything worth preserving of the times they recorded.'

The condemnation of newsreel content was virtually unanimous, and articles with titles such as 'Are Newsreels News?' were frequently found in the film journals. Writing for *SIGHT AND SOUND* in 1933, in a piece entitled 'Newsreel, Reality or Entertainment?', Donald Fraser laid the blame for the shortcomings of the newsreel at the door of the respective companies. He said of them: 'British Movietone strives after a BBC impartiality, although it is a BBC jockey trying to ride a Wardour Street horse. Paramount News approximates very closely to the American tabloid. Gaumont Graphic suggests a bourgeois atmosphere, redolent of public houses. While Universal Talking News inclines more and more to the funny page of the Chorlton-cum-Hardy Gazette.'

It is certainly true that the newsreels contained more than their fair share of lightweight stories. Such matters as giant pandas at London Zoo were as common in the cinema newsreel as they are today on television news. Yet by the same token the newsreels were just as capable of carrying a great number of 'hard' news stories, which were dealt with in a 'serious' manner. The numerous surveys which were conducted both at the time that the newsreels were operating and since their closure as production companies show that to be very much the case.

Edgar Dale's *The Content of Motion Pictures* and Leo Handel's *Hollywood Looks at its Audience*, for example, contain statistical surveys of the American newsreel

in the 30s and the 40s which show that the American product was not necessarily either parochial or petty. More recent surveys in Britain have tended to look at British newsreel coverage of particular events or countries rather than attempt a comprehensive survey of content as a whole. The Slade Film History Register, for instance, looked at two British newsreels, British Paramount and British Movietone, in order to ascertain how many stories were issued between 1933 and 1939 relating specifically to Germany or the Germans. Though it found that there was a low number of stories per annum reflecting news on Germany, in fact the proportion of serious items on Germany, within that number, was very high.

My own researches on the coverage of the Spanish Civil War by British Paramount and Gaumont British have shown that, on a purely quantitative level at least, Spain was very well covered. During the period from July 27 1936, when the first story on Spain appeared in Gaumont British issue No. 269, to April 3 1939, when issue No. 549 covered the entry of Franco's troops into Madrid, there were altogether 280 newsreel releases from this company. The Spanish Civil War was reported in 71 of these 280 releases, a quarter of the possible coverage. British Paramount's first report on Spain appeared in issue No. 568 for August 6 1936. And from that point until issue No. 845 for April 3 1939, there was mention of the Spanish Civil War in 64 out of a possible 277 releases.

In the Spring issue of SIGHT AND SOUND, we published an article by Jonathan Lewis, 'Before Hindsight', about the attitudes of film-makers and of the newsreels to political issues of the 1930s. Dr. Tony Aldgate, who has been researching specifically the British newsreel coverage of the Spanish Civil War, here writes about newsreel content and censorship. Both articles refer to perhaps the most significant case of 30s censorship: the deletion of items from Paramount's issue of September 22, 1938, during the Munich crisis.

Of course quantity is no indicator of quality. But if proof were needed that the newsreels were considered capable of dealing with straight news, then the various attempts to censor them provide adequate evidence of how seriously they were taken in the 30s in some quarters.

Despite the fact that the British newsreels were not officially subject to a review by the Board of Film Censors, they were subject to certain pressures. As Neville March Hunnings has pointed out in his book *Film Censors and the Law*, the newsreels were simply left 'in a more exposed position, for they were completely unprotected by the law.' They were left open to criticism from any quarter whatsoever, and could never escape the pressures either from public opinion or from the possibility of official action.

A tendency to sacrifice all decency to sensationalism

Before 1935, the public criticism of newsreels was mostly concerned with the depiction of violence. Today one tends to form the impression that the public outcry against violence on the screen is for the

most part a post-war phenomenon, stepped up by the arrival of television.* But there is enough evidence to suggest that it was as prevalent in the 30s as it is now. One good example turned up in *The Times* for Friday, December 1, 1933, in a piece entitled 'Horror in News Films'. It said that, 'There is now being shown in this country an American newsreel which ends with a shot of one of the lynched kidnappers of a certain Mr. Hart hanging from a tree surrounded by a howling mob.' The columnist was evidently worried about the supposed effect of this newsreel upon the undoubtedly vast cinema audiences, for he continued 'this is the latest and most horrifying manifestation of a growing tendency to sacrifice all decency to sensationalism in the presentation of news on the screen... It is greatly to be hoped that before long steps will be taken to safeguard the public from the exhibition of such scenes.'

What is of special interest is the response that such outcries elicited from the newsreel companies. This particular newsreel was withdrawn from the cinemas, in order that the scene might be excised. In a statement circulated to all the press an official of British Paramount, the offending company, stated that: 'In view of the public resentment at the showing of this newsreel we have decided to withdraw the whole shot. I would make it clear that there has been no question of representation from official sources, nor at the time it was withdrawn did we know that it was intended to ask a question about it in the House of Commons. We are servants of the public and we withdraw it as a gesture to their opinion.'

But such overt acts of self-censorship were not enough to stave off the mounting criticism, particularly from local authorities. Early in 1934, Warwickshire County Council wrote to the Film Censorship Consultative Committee at the Home Office and demanded that newsreels be censored. All in all, 1934 proved to be a bad year for the newsreels. The county councils, the Film Censorship Consultative Committee and the British Board of Film Censors were all making noises about possible censorship.

Finally the government felt compelled to step in, and on October 24 1934 the Home Office issued circular 676417/6 under the title 'Cinematograph Act 1909: Revision of Model Conditions'. Obviously this was a sop to public opinion and to the pressure which had emanated from the local authorities. For the most part the circular concerned itself, not unexpectedly, with the depiction of violence and with the question of what constituted a proper interpretation of the term 'photographs of current events', in order that licensing authorities could consider the desirability of adopting the revised model conditions to licences granted by them. It went on: 'There may be a great difference between the effects produced on the screen and by a description in a newspaper. And it is necessary, in order that the

susceptibilities of the public may not be offended, that this fact be taken into account in the presentation of pictures and commentary at cinematograph exhibitions. It should be borne in mind that the first of the model conditions which prohibits the exhibition of films likely to be offensive to public feelings, applies to newsreels as well as other films.'

Newsreels avoid controversial subjects

Yet for all the public clamour, this circular seems to be as far as the government felt compelled to go, in order to be seen to have acted over the matter of violence in newsreels. The government never felt the necessity to interfere with the newsreel companies over this issue, or to impose censorship on them. The fact was, of course, that the Home Office cared very little about what the newsreels showed unless they reflected upon events which the government considered to be politically sensitive. Violence in itself did not necessarily carry political implications; violence in the context of war probably did. And yet it is noticeable that when the newsreels got round to covering the violence in the Abyssinian War or the Spanish Civil War, they managed to get away with a lot more in the way of gruesome film coverage than they had ever done previously.

The point was quite simply that it served the government's foreign policy interests to have the horrors of war stressed by reference to these two spheres of conflict, particularly with regard to Spain when the policy of non-intervention became a contentious issue. So nobody balked at the prospect of a British Paramount News story, in issue 481 for October 7 1935, in which the editor joined together genuine newsreel footage from the Abyssinian conflict with fabricated feature film footage from America, to emphasise the point that war is horrible. Similarly nobody could fail to understand the message implicit in Gaumont's story on Guernica, in issue 350, from a commentary which ran: 'First pictures from the Basque Republic of the Holy City of Guernica, scene of the most terrible air-raid our modern history yet can boast. Hundreds were killed here, men, women and children. Four thousand bombs were dropped out of a blue sky into a hell that raged unchecked for five murderous hours. This was a city and these were homes like yours.'

The County Councils might still complain, as indeed they did when the County Councils Association again reared its head and repeated its former proposal for censorship, 'drawing attention to the fact that scenes of war, sudden death and violence were included in newsreels.' But this time the newsreel companies felt more confident. They were on firmer ground, and could get away with such bland assurances, totally ignoring the point, as the following: 'No newsreel will issue a subject dealing with crime. This is a self-imposed ordinance. In the same way newsreels avoid controversial subjects.'

The newsreels did indeed avoid controversial subjects, as far as the government was concerned, and that may be the root cause of so much of the contemporary criticism of their content. Although after 1935 the British government of the day became increasingly worried about the unsettling events in the rest of Europe, it was not disturbed further by the newsreel industry's reflection of those events. The newsreels for the most part implicitly endorsed the government's stand on foreign affairs, except for one notable occasion when censorship, albeit indirectly, was applied.

At the same time, the newsreels were putting forth their own rosy picture of precisely where Britain stood in the midst of all this European turmoil. The newsreel projection of Britain during this period was perhaps best exemplified by a Gaumont story released on August 27 1936 in issue 278. The story was entitled 'Wonderful Britain' and its commentary stated:

'At this time when the agony of Spain streaks like a jagged scar across the face of Europe, it is well to pause and reflect upon the position of the world today. In the passage of time it is no far cry back to Abyssinia, so recently wracked with the torments of awful war. From Abyssinia our review takes us to Palestine where racial factions clash unhappily day to day, where riot and slaughter crowd an all-too-complete programme of misery and despair.'

Fortunate Britain still with its tradition of sanity

'In a spirit not of boastfulness but rather of gratitude we turn from these fitful scenes to fortunate Britain, still with its tradition of sanity the rock of steadying influence amid the eddying streams of world affairs. Britain's industries have shaken off the chains that kept them fettered in the aftermath of the World War. They have risen from the slough of despond which clogged the wheel of progress in the depression of the last decade. Trade returns are steadily improving. Weekly and monthly the official statistics form a heartening accompaniment to the efforts alike of the small merchant and the big boss of giant industry, to better times. Our railways today stand second to none. Shipbuilding yards, for many years hushed in the inertia of unemployment, have been given a lead by the triumphant completion of the Queen Mary, now unquestionably supreme upon the mercantile lanes of the sea...'

The message was obvious and the points of contrast were clear. Britain was being offset against Spain, Abyssinia and Palestine as a bastion of peace, stability and prosperity. The image of Britain as a rock was one that appeared often in all the newsreels. Of course this idealised picture was vastly at odds with reality. The predominantly working class cinema audiences of the time would have appreciated all too easily what the reality of the situation was like. And in fact Britain had by no means fully recovered from the effects of the depression. There were still large numbers of unemployed.

*On April 15, 1977, it may be worth noting, Shirley Williams was quoted in the *Daily Mail* as having asked the television companies 'to cut down on violence in their early evening news bulletins, for the sake of the children watching.' 'I do not believe in censorship,' she said, 'but television has a duty to exercise voluntary restraint in these matters.'

But the newsreel stories had a ready-made answer for that as well. In order to put across the politically divisive issue of Britain's rearmament, for instance, it was closely tied in by one newsreel company with the problem of unemployment, as a potential palliative. Both matters were then linked to a patriotic clarion call for peace through strength. The story, entitled 'Britain Re-arms', was released in Gaumont's issue 328 for February 18 1937 with a commentary as follows:

'Parliament has decided that Britain shall spend one thousand, five hundred millions on arms in the next five years. Not directed against any one country, said the Chancellor, but because of our vast responsibilities in all parts of the world, and as a measure for the preservation of peace. This means no remission in taxation, but it gives security. Even more than that, it will reduce the figures of unemployment. More ships mean more men at work, building, supplying them with every class of material needed on a modern man of war . . .

'Mechanisation of the Army will go forward at record speed. Motor car factories will work full pressure. More men at work, more employment . . . Every aeroplane, every tank, every ship means more work and more safety. Even if it means an increase in taxation, what a great insurance. It is a life policy. Even if it does mean an increase it also means security, more employment and the preservation of peace for this great country of ours, this British Empire.'

There were few dissenting newsreel voices to be found in the midst of such neo-propaganda. What few there were found themselves increasingly restricted by a government attitude which hardened as the events in Europe got worse.

Sir John Simon: 'certain passages . . . might have a prejudicial effect upon the negotiations.' Joseph Kennedy: 'It is very interesting to find such an accommodating ambassador'



Geoffrey Mander, Liberal M.P. who raised the censorship issue

This restrictive attitude manifested itself most strongly with regard to a British Paramount newsreel released during the Munich crisis. British Paramount, with the independently minded Tom Cummings in charge of production, devoted a good deal of screen time in their issue of September 22 1938 to a discussion of the problem of Czechoslovakia, in which Wickham Steed and A. J. Cummings had been invited to speak. The issue was withdrawn after the first day of release. A telegram was allegedly sent by Paramount to all cinemas taking their newsreel saying: 'Please delete Wickham Steed and A. J. Cummings from today's Paramount News. We have been officially requested to do so.' They later claimed that they had withdrawn the items on their own initiative. However, on November 23, Geoffrey Mander, Liberal M.P. for East Wolverhampton, asked in the House of Commons: 'Why representations were recently made by His Majesty's



Government to the American Embassy for the withdrawal from a Paramount newsreel of items contributed by Mr. Wickham Steed and Mr. A. J. Cummings?'

Sir John Simon, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, spoke in reply: 'His Majesty's Government considered that certain passages in the newsreel referred to, which was being shown at the time of the Prime Minister's conversations with Herr Hitler at Godesberg, might have a prejudicial effect upon the negotiations. The Ambassador of the United States, I understand, thought it right to communicate this consideration to a member of the Hays organisation which customarily deals with matters of this kind and which brought it to the attention of Paramount News, who, from a sense of duty in the public interest, decided to make certain excisions from the newsreel . . . I am glad that the Ambassador and ourselves were in complete accord.'

If indeed this account accurately reflects the truth of the operation, and there is little reason to believe that it does not, then it gives a good idea of the tortuous yet effective way in which the government had set about securing the excisions it desired whilst at the same time ensuring that it appeared to 'keep its hands clean'. Presumably the Foreign Secretary informed the American Ambassador, Joseph P. Kennedy, of the offending items. He in turn informed the Hays office in America. The Hays office must have conveyed the feelings of all concerned to the head office of American Paramount. And they finally would have got back to the offices of British Paramount in London in order to effect the cuts. Understandably, Sir John Simon's argument that the British Government and the American Ambassador just happened to find themselves in complete accord over this matter did not convince anybody. As Geoffrey Mander put it succinctly, in the House of Commons: 'It is very interesting to find such an accommodating Ambassador, very remarkable.'

Has England surrendered?

What is more important, however, is to examine the excisions that were made in order to determine whether the government might have wished to cut any items. The story was issued then as part of Paramount's release for September 22 1938 and entitled 'Europe's Fateful Hour'. It included frontier scenes from the Sudetenland, shots of refugees in Germany and Prague, shots of Germany's new defences on the Rhine, a view of Godesberg preparing for the meeting of Hitler and Chamberlain and, finally, film of demonstrations in London. In the course of this comprehensive narrative of events, Paramount introduced Wickham Steed as the former editor of *The Times* and a friend of President Masaryk of Czechoslovakia. Then the commentary went on: 'British Paramount News, seeking still further independent and informed opinion, interviewed the famous foreign affairs journalist, Mr. A. J. Cummings; and for the man-in-the-street's viewpoint sought the popular

broadcasting taxi-driver, Mr. Herbert Hodge.'

Such a band of people brought together for the purpose of an interview on a topic of current affairs is now commonplace in broadcasting, provided of course some time is allotted for the opinion of the government under criticism. But the technique as applied to the newsreel must have been unique in its day and thereby that much more open to attack. Wickham Steed began with a straightforward speech which ran: 'Has England surrendered? Who is "England"? The Government or Parliament or the people? The British Parliament has not surrendered for it has not been convened, and still less have the British people. Our Government, together with that of France, is trying to make a present to Hitler, for use against us when he may think the time has come, of the three million men and thousands of aeroplanes he would need to overcome Czechoslovak resistance. Hitler doesn't want to fight. Oh, no. He only wants to get without fighting more than he would be able to get by fighting. And we seem to be helping him to get it. And all because British and French ministers feared to take a risk when they could have taken it successfully and believed they could diminish the risk by helping Hitler to gain a triumph, when he was at his wit's end, instead of standing up to him.'

It is possible to ascertain from the script for this story in the Paramount archives that, even as it stood and before it was excised completely, Wickham Steed's speech had been shorn of a concluding paragraph in a piece of self-censorship by Paramount. Evidently Paramount felt his intended final words went too far in declaring that 'There may still be a chance of averting the worst if we encourage the Czechs to stand firm and make our Government understand that we repudiate its policy of surrendering our vital interests and besmirching our good name.'

After Wickham Steed's speech there then followed a dialogue between Hodge and Cummings:

HODGE: Well, Mr. Cummings, what do you think of the news? Everybody's saying to me that England has surrendered to Hitler. Do you think that's right?

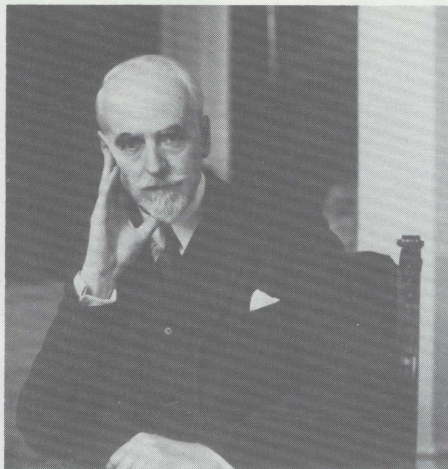
CUMMINGS: Well, beyond a doubt, Hitler has won an overwhelming diplomatic triumph for German domination of Europe. Nothing in future will stop him but a mass war.

HODGE: I think most of us, although we want peace, er, with all our hearts, we would be prepared to go to war if it was a case of either going to war or allowing Hitler to dominate Europe.

CUMMINGS: The fact is our statesmen have been guilty of what I think is a piece of yellow diplomacy. If in good time we had made a joint declaration with France and with Russia making clear our intentions, and stating emphatically and in expressed terms that we would prevent the invasion of Czechoslovakia, I'm certain that Hitler would not have faced that formidable combination. If we were not prepared to go to the extreme limit we should certainly not have engaged in a game of bluff with the finest poker player in Europe.

HODGE: What worries me about it all, Mr. Cummings, is whether we've simply postponed war for another year or two, against a much stronger Hitler of the future.

CUMMINGS: I'm afraid we've only postponed war and, frankly, I am very fearful about what is yet in store for millions of young men of military age in all the countries of Europe.



Censored: Wickham Steed (above) and the broadcasting taxi-driver Herbert Hodge



These then were the speeches which were cut from the Paramount release. They are indeed harshly critical of the government's policy, though they displayed great foresight, and one can understand why many people might not have wanted them to be shown in cinemas throughout the country. Perhaps Paramount might have got away without cuts if they had thought to include a government spokesman. But it is more than likely that Tom Cummings, Paramount's editor-in-chief, knew the only way to pursue a policy of utilising political commentators was by means of a *fait accompli*. Nor can one disguise the fact that the successful pressure to delete these items amounted to little more than political censorship of a supposedly free medium of communication. In their stead the three speakers were replaced by a new story entitled 'Premier flies for peace' in which Neville Chamberlain said: 'A peaceful solution of the Czechoslovak problem is an essential preliminary to a better understanding between the British and the German peoples, and that, in its turn, is an indispensable foundation of European peace. European peace is what I am aiming at, and I hope that this journey may open the way to get it.'

Geoffrey Mander recounted the nature of the excisions to the House when for a third time, on December 7, he raised the whole matter of censorship and the restriction of liberty. This time, however, he also tabled a motion: 'That this House, attaching the utmost importance to the maintenance undiminished of British democratic tradition

of the liberty of expression of opinion, both in the press and in public meetings and also in other media such as cinema films, would greatly deplore any action by the Government of the day which tended to set up any form of political censorship or which exercised pressure direct or indirect.'

Nothing anti-Government is permitted

Besides the example of the Paramount newsreel, he went on to mention other instances of what he believed to be political interference on films such as *Nazi Conquest No. 1. (Austria)*, *Inside Nazi Germany*, *Croix de Feu*, and another one called *Crisis in Algeria*. The main point of Mander's long speech was encapsulated in his request to the House to observe: 'That in all the examples I have given, in every case where cuts have been made, nothing anti-Government, nothing anti-Fascist is permitted, but anything that is favourable to the policy the Government is pursuing is allowed to go forward . . . I do not say by any means that it is always done at the direct instigation of the Government, but I do believe there is pressure by Government departments or by their friends at times. It is widely alleged in the press and elsewhere that the Conservative Central Office is not wholly disinterested in or without knowledge of what is going on.'

But despite a heated debate and strong endorsements of Mander's sentiments from other members, including Archibald Sinclair, Dingle Foot, Philip Noel Baker and Wedgwood Benn, an amendment to his motion from a Mr. Beechman, which added that the House 'is fully satisfied that His Majesty's Government have maintained these traditions unimpaired' finally won the day, and in effect proved the death knell for the concern over censorship in the Commons.

There were subsequent nominal questions raised in the House throughout 1939, but the feelings which had built up to the debate of December, 1938, demonstrated the highest point of fear among M.P.s about the manipulation of the newsreels. Of course, within a short time the newsreels found themselves in the midst of a Second World War, during which, as one might expect, they were strictly regulated as to what they could and could not show, and anyway became part of an overall propaganda machine under official control.

The spectre of censorship or of public and governmental pressure haunted the 1930s. The newsreels simply had to learn to live with it. On a more general level it is possible to see the years from 1933 to 1939 as leading quite logically and cumulatively towards the kind of government control that manifested itself during World War II.

The pressures of public opinion took their toll in the early years and sufficiently sapped the strength of the newsreel companies as well as reducing their capacity for an independent, informed opinion, if indeed they ever had one. The local county councils helped and the government of the day finally broke it.



U.S. TELEVISION 1976/77

Roots and Angels



James Monaco

When I wrote about U.S. television in SIGHT AND SOUND eighteen months ago, prime-time programming was a relatively sedate and gentlemanly three-handed chess game, which proceeded according to certain time-honoured rules and was therefore relatively susceptible to critical analysis. The bulk of programming consisted of weekly series of 22 to 26 episodes which were introduced with great fanfare during the same week each September, ran their inevitable course, and went into repeats for the summer every March. Apart from the occasional special event, programming executives at the three networks had little opportunity to better their positions significantly on the ratings field of battle during the year. New series were given at least until January to prove their potential, at which time a handful of replacements—the so-called 'Second Season'—could be introduced. But this second team rarely had any measurable effect on the eventual season ratings of the three networks, and the great programmers of the 1960s—Mike Dann, James Aubrey—made their reputations by being able to construct a relatively rigid schedule each spring for the succeeding year. Most of the action in this esoteric but hugely profitable sport took place in March and April, during the six or eight weeks before the new season's schedules were announced. Once published, those charts were inviolate. Time slots had a near-religious significance. To shift a programme from one night to another *between* seasons was tantamount to an admission of failure. To shift it *during* the season was unheard of.

All that has changed in the last year. It's not chess that programming resembles now, but a free-for-all ice hockey brawl, with no time-outs and no officials on the ice. The programmers' new motto is 'go for what you know'. Programmes are yanked from the schedule with abandon after as little as two weeks; successful shows are moved from slot to slot like utility outfielders (to mix sports metaphors); more programmes have already been plugged in as replacements since October than originally opened in September; and, most important, the half-year weekly series has gone the way of the 8-cylinder automobile. Programmes are now anywhere from two to 2,000 hours in length, and they are scheduled weekly, monthly, daily or continuously. Network programming now operates in 'real time', as the computer jargon has it, and it's necessary to check programme listings daily to find out what the current battle positions are.

The reason for this revolution is simple: the classic balance among the three networks was upset last year when ABC, the perennial also-ran (with significantly fewer affiliates) pulled a major upset, coming first in the yearly Nielsen ratings for the first time in history. Previously, NBC and CBS had been content to share pride of place, with CBS usually slightly ahead, while ABC straggled along behind, content with an occasional coup (and the not insignificant revenues that accrue to even the third place network in the monopoly system that services the nation's 200 million-plus viewers). When ABC had the temerity to win a season, the rule book was junked. Ironically, this has only helped to consolidate ABC's position as leader. Near the end of Nielsen's approximately 28-week main season, the youngest of the three networks had a remarkable 5.1 point lead over CBS (NBC, as usual, was running close behind

CBS). ABC's stock has more than doubled during the last year.

Much of this surprising success can be attributed to Fred Silverman, the young programme executive ABC hired away from CBS last year. He more than anyone has been responsible for the radically changed shape of network programming: the shift away from open-end weekly series to closed-end mini-series, the move from season programming to real time programming (what the ABC publicity people call the 'living schedule'), and the concomitant change in emphasis from sitcom and police/adventure to the more generalised drama of the 'television novel'.

Not to give Silverman more credit than he deserves, it should be noted that his talents so far—unlike those of Aubrey and Dann in the 60s—have mainly evinced themselves in scheduling rather than programme development. Even before he came to the network, ABC had made plans to experiment with short-form limited series. *Roots*, the keystone of this season's success, was already in production (David L. Wolper produced, Warners distributed). ABC is currently enjoying such inordinate success that it may be several years before Silverman actually has a chance to demonstrate what he can do as a programme originator. During one week last February, for example, all but one of ABC's prime-time programmes had an audience share of 30 per cent or more (the poorest rated show had 29 per cent). Generally, a share of 30 is considered the criterion for success. So Silverman is in the position of having to use up new programmes already contracted for as late spring and summer fill-ins, and he may have to bump ordinarily successful shows in order to make room for a handful of new programmes this autumn.

We return again to the basic commandment of the television programming game: the unalterable limits of prime time. Like his competitors Irwin Segelstein at NBC and

Donald 'Bud' Grant at CBS, Silverman has only 21 hours of prime time per week and nothing he can do will change this. The playing field has strict perimeters, but these redound to the networks' benefit more often than not. There are no real losers in monopoly broadcasting. By the end of the summer of 1976, after a season that was generally rated as artistically abysmal on all counts, all three networks—'winner' and 'losers' alike—had sold more than 90 per cent of their advertising time available for the coming year. Figures are even better this year, despite significant rises in rates. (An average commercial minute next season will sell for \$125,000.) An advertiser who wants to use television simply has nowhere else to go, and this past season has marked the arrival of the saturation point in U.S. network broadcast advertising.

As a result, there has been more talk than usual this year about starting a fourth network. Yet paradoxically, despite the greater number of individual channels available and in operation in the U.S., that would be much more difficult here than in Britain. The channel spectrum in all major population centres is already saturated. A fourth network would have to be composed of already operating independent stations, and in the great majority of cases it would be at a significant disadvantage, lacking the capital to provide a real challenge to the existing networks. Of course, there is a fourth network—PBS—which has a larger number of affiliates than any of the commercial networks, although many of them are hard-to-receive UHF stations. Public Broadcasting, however, is never in direct competition with ABC, CBS and NBC and was devised to serve the minority rather than the general audience. Its most popular show in its ten years of existence has been *Monty Python's Flying Circus* which, even at its height, seldom achieved a rating much above ten—a figure which would doom it to the nether regions of the ratings list for the commercial networks. Often, a 'popular' PBS programme has no more than a two per cent share. Nevertheless, a number of advertisers, especially those interested in establishing corporate images, have seen fit to spend a large part of their advertising dollar 'funding' (rather than 'sponsoring') PBS series. One is reminded of the 'indirect' advertising—which forbade mention of prices—considered *de rigueur* during the earliest days of radio broadcasting, before advertisers realised audiences would put up with out and out sales pitches.

More than likely, the real challenge to the commercial triumvirate will come not from a fourth broadcast network, but from a cable network. That's where significant amounts of entertainment industry capital are being spent. But this fight is still some years off. The commercial potential of cable is exceeded only by the continual technological ferment in the industry. Warner Cable will institute the first fully operational 'two-way' cable system in Columbus, Ohio, this coming winter. After subscribing to the basic service, customers will have the option of paying for specific individual programmes. A central computer will scan the entire system regularly to determine who is watching what and bill accordingly. More important, each cable converter will be equipped with five 'answer buttons' with

Left: 'Roots': Levar Burton as Kunta Kinte; 'Charlie's Angels': Farrah Fawcett-Majors and other angels

which the customer can signal the computer directly. Warner heralds the possibilities for instant voting, multiple-choice tests and the like in their publicity, but the real function of these answer buttons, it seems, will be to serve as an instant, painless alternative to more cumbersome means of ordering products. No longer necessary to pick up the phone or fill in the postcard to place an order; just reach over and press button A! Eventually, cable may find itself more in competition with Sears, Roebuck and direct mail sales than with network television.

Does all this worry the networks, who have enjoyed a lucrative monopoly in transmitted home entertainment for the last fifty years? Not much. Last year, the year CBS lost its pre-eminent position in prime time television, also happened to be its best year ever in terms of sales, which were up 20 per cent over the previous fiscal year. (CBS likes to call itself 'the largest advertising medium in the world'.) It's important to remember, too, that both CBS and NBC (ABC to a lesser extent) are highly conglomerated enterprises. CBS, Inc. had net sales of more than \$2.2 billion in the fiscal year 1976, but only 37 per cent of this revenue came from network television operations. CBS, Inc. is also heavily involved in phonograph records, retail sales, children's toys, magazine and book publishing. In January 1977, the company plunked down \$50 million in cash to buy the Fawcett publishing company, a major producer of paperback books. Likewise, NBC is only one of many divisions—prestigious to be sure, but not essential—of RCA, Inc. which sells, in addition to television and radio programming, computers, aerospace equipment, records, frozen foods, books, car rentals and carpets.

If broadcast television were to cease tomorrow, both these companies would be injured, no doubt, but certainly not fatally. This situation puts American television into an interesting perspective. If the programming available on the three networks often seems to give the impression that no one cares, it's because, at the highest corporate levels, they don't much, actually. If they set out consciously to lose money they probably couldn't, considering the monopoly position they hold; and if they did, well, there are lots of other profit centres in the corporation, potentially perhaps more remunerative than television.

If it seems that I have spent an inordinate amount of time on the business of television, as opposed to its 'art', there is a good reason: despite their unprecedented number, there has been no new series of more than passing interest this year. Of course, the 'vast wasteland' of television is a venerable truism, yet that phrase seems to have more meaning this year than most. Invariably, the new shows repeat ageing patterns and formulas with a remarkable lack of wit, humour or invention. It's almost as if Silverman and friends were engaging in a private and blackly comic game to see just how much pap they can get away with.

A lot. This past winter, the average television set in the U.S. was turned on (although not necessarily watched) for nearly eight hours a day: a new record. And this should provide a clue to the new direction.

More and more, American TV provides environment rather than entertainment. Some of the most successful shows are the blandest and emptiest. Network audience researchers might just have discovered that programmes which attract interest, demand attention and provoke thought and feeling concomitantly damage ratings. So the series, which still dominate the schedules, are generally given over to random adventure, uniform 'variety' and exceptionally thin situation comedy, all of it watered down. If the television diet were richer, after all, people would consume less of it.

I know this sounds suspiciously like the standard liberal critique of the medium, but I don't mean it to be taken in that context. No one should be more relieved than the television critic to discover that much of network programming is a blank: otherwise, the result would be an acute case of sensory overload. The series fill up time with pleasant colours and noises. More dramatic, ironic, witty or interesting fare is left for the specials or, increasingly, the mini-series.

The exceptions, I think, prove the rule. Everyone agrees that the most innovative and attractive series of the last six or seven years have been *Mary Tyler Moore*, *All in the Family*, *Kojak* and *Columbo*. Without exception, these have all been weekend shows. Broadcast during the one period in the weekly schedule when audiences can be assumed to have enough energy actually to watch, follow and actively enjoy a programme, these four benefited greatly from their privileged positions. Moreover, when CBS switched *Kojak* to Tuesday night this season (to bolster a disastrous schedule), the show immediately dropped markedly in popularity.

Even the series of sociological or phenomenological interest share the general mindlessness. The most successful new series this year, ABC's *Charlie's Angels*, is a case in point. Featuring three mod young woman detectives who are, each week, assigned a relatively innocuous case by their avuncular boss 'Charlie' (we never see him), the show is painfully dull. Great quantities of time pass with nothing happening but a few lines of non sequitur dialogue, plots unravel before the half-hour mark, story lines stutter and die. As an action show, *Charlie's Angels* is a character study—without characters. The women who play the interchangeable leads may well have been fine actresses before this assignment, but they clearly had to adapt the classic starlet image to get these jobs. Only a suspicion of personality differentiates them. They spend most of their time posing and smiling. If the show were any more complicated than it is, it would be worth some effort to analyse the curious mixture of feminism (the women are the active heroes) and sexism (they act only on Charlie's orders).

This is clearly a pale spin-off ('drip-off' might be a more appropriate term) from ABC's success of a few seasons back, *The Mod Squad*. Yet, surprisingly, one of the three actresses, Farrah Fawcett-Majors, has gripped the fancy of millions of people. A colour poster of her has sold close to 10 million copies. Her hairdo (which, at least to me, is indistinguishable from that of her two

allies) has become enormously popular. Within the same month last spring, Farrah and her hair found themselves on the covers of three leading women's magazines (*Vogue*, *McCall's* and *Woman's Day*), each of which is directed at a significantly different class level (upper-middle, middle and working class). In Linwood, Kansas, a popular high school girl showed up one day with a Farrah cut; her classmates threw nitric acid at her to teach her a lesson in pride. Farrah is the subject of earnest discussion in the intellectual journals and university departments of popular culture.

Why? There are several reasons. First, and most important, Farrah is the latest in a line of pre-teen heroines that began several years ago with Cher and has most recently included Lindsay Wagner, the *Bionic Woman*. Like Cher, Farrah gives the impression of being not quite real—a life-size Barbie doll. But the phenomenon is more complex than it first appears. It's not only the doll-like quality of the heroines that attracts the eight to twelve-year-old hard-core fans, it's also the complicated relationship between the roles these women play on television and the roles they play in their media-reported lives. Much of the interest in Cher centred round her relationships with men: Sonny, her former husband and partner, Greg Allman, the rock star, by whom she had a child, then Sonny again, who returned as partner on the variety show (but not as husband). The two of them squeezed an extra season out of jokes about their curious connections. Farrah, on the other hand, is married to the well-established pre-teen idol Lee Majors, the cartoon-like science-fiction character of *The Six Million Dollar Man*. (Lindsay Wagner, who held centre stage briefly last year, so far has evinced a singularly uninteresting 'private life'.) Farrah also gains from working regularly in commercials, and so bridges a double gap: between the commercial and the programme, on the one hand, and television and 'real life' on the other.

More important, however, both Cher and now Farrah have a tenuous, subtle yet distinct sense of humour about their roles. This more than anything, I think, endears them. They are at once sex symbols and parodies of sex symbols. It's the Mae West syndrome, the necessary changes being made. The result is a tricky, fascinating phenomenon. Like the structure of *Charlie's Angels* itself, Farrah's notoriety is an ironic and paradoxical mix of old and new values. She's sexy, cute, girlish, obedient, and knows her place, but she's also (mildly) comic and manages to communicate a hint of irony about this traditional role.

Maybe this perplexing formula—the proper balance of old values with new—is more prevalent than it seems. The received opinion of *Mary Tyler Moore* (the show, not the woman) sees it as a major step for feminism. Mary Richards was the first woman character on television to make the single life not only conceivable as an alternative but even possibly attractive. Nevertheless, as the TV representative of the new woman, Mary certainly played a recognisably traditional sex role. She, too, was cute and lovably girlish and knew her place. Imagine, after seven years on the job, holding the powerful position of associate producer, and still calling the boss 'Mr.

Grant'. Only a trustworthily old-fashioned girl would do that.

Mary Tyler Moore (the woman) gained considerable attention this past spring by making the unprecedented move of cancelling the seven-year-old series when it was showing no signs of fading. The series was unusual in having allowed the character of Mary Richards to evolve during its seven-year run. When the *Mary Tyler Moore* show began on September 19, 1970, Mary was thirty years old; when it ended on March 19, 1977, she was 37. Moore also made a point of bringing the saga to a pointed conclusion. (This is almost unique for a long-running series. The only one in my memory actually to end, rather than simply cease, was *The Fugitive* in the 60s.) The next to penultimate show summarised the long run by flashing back to earlier seasons as Mary and Lou Grant reminisced about failed parties Mary had given. The penultimate show dealt ambiguously with Mary and Lou's relationship. (After seven years of 'Mr. Grant' Mary was unlikely to allow a romance to blossom for a neat end to the show; her inhibitions triumphed once more.) The 168th and final episode gave us Mary, Lou, Murray and Sue Ann being fired by a new station owner. Rhoda and Phyllis visited for a reprise. At the conclusion, Moore brought the cast out for a curtain call in front of the studio audience. A nice touch, for it reminded us gently that the myths of television are the products of human beings.

It's unlikely that we will see as finely crafted a regular series again for some time. The future belongs to pastime series and more ambitious mini-series. The original model for the type was, of course, the BBC's *Forsyte Saga*, which played on PBS in the States in 1970 and set the pattern for British imports which has now sustained the Public Service for eight years. The commercial networks gingerly edged into the format several years ago with inflated made-for-television movies based on novels (Fletcher Knebel's *Vanished*, Leon Uris' *QB VII*, Joseph Wambaugh's *The Blue Knight*). It was not until early 1976, however, that ABC felt confident enough (or desperate enough) to take a chance on a fully-fledged serial of more than three or four parts. This was Irwin Shaw's *Rich Man, Poor Man*, the ten-part serialisation of which was partially responsible for ABC's first-place finish last year. One swallow does not make a summer, and ABC did not have the courage of their convictions. Confronted with a limited hit, they immediately scheduled an open-ended successor—*Rich Man, Poor Man, Book II*—for this past season. Although NBC had committed themselves to a series of novels for television this season, the success of the format was not assured until the astonishing triumph of *Roots*, the 12-hour film shown on eight successive evenings in late January, 1977.

No one had any idea that *Roots* would be a historic phenomenon. Neither NBC nor CBS tried any serious counter-programming for *Roots* week and, in fact, it's more than likely that Silverman took the unique step of scheduling it on eight successive evenings simply because he didn't think the material would be strong enough to carry audience interest through twelve weeks. Indeed, *Roots* is not an especially well made film,

whatever that criticism is worth. No matter, it touched a national nerve. There is a direct line of succession from *Birth of a Nation* through *Gone With the Wind* to *Roots*; and the latter, with its black perspective, clearly has it hands down over those two earlier versions of U.S. racial history from the white perspective. If it's possible for a nation of 215 million people to have a communal experience, *Roots* week was it. 130 million people watched at least part of it. School classes were given over to discussions of it. In the weeks that followed, thousands of infants were named after characters Kunta Kinte and Kizzy. Clearly, the programme had the full attention of 25 million black Americans, but it also riveted more than 100 million whites to their sets for eight consecutive evenings.



'Kojak' (Telly Savalas). Too demanding for Tuesday nights?

One must remember that as little as ten years ago, black Americans simply did not exist in the television universe. Apart from an occasional song by Harry Belafonte or Sammy Davis, or a rare guest spot from Sidney Poitier, the small screen was white, aside from the obligatory maids and chauffeurs. All that changed radically in the late 60s and early 70s. Once blacks were seen regularly on commercials, their existence was validated for the major segment of the nation whose reality is determined by the televised image of the world. *Roots* came at the crest of this wave. The wonder and surprise with which it was met in large part demonstrated once again the wide gap between literary culture and general culture. For people who read, the saga of *Roots* is nothing new. It has been explicated in hundreds of books during the last ten or fifteen years. But most people don't read. Most people don't even go to the movies more than once or twice a year. Most people watch television, and television had never dealt specifically with the subject of slavery. True, Bill Cosby had narrated a superb and angry essay, *Black History: Lost, Stolen, or Strayed*, as early as 1968 during the height of the Black Power movement, but whites had turned off to it. They were finally ready for *Roots*, however, having been softened up by eight years of blacks in commercials and taking secondary roles in

regular series.

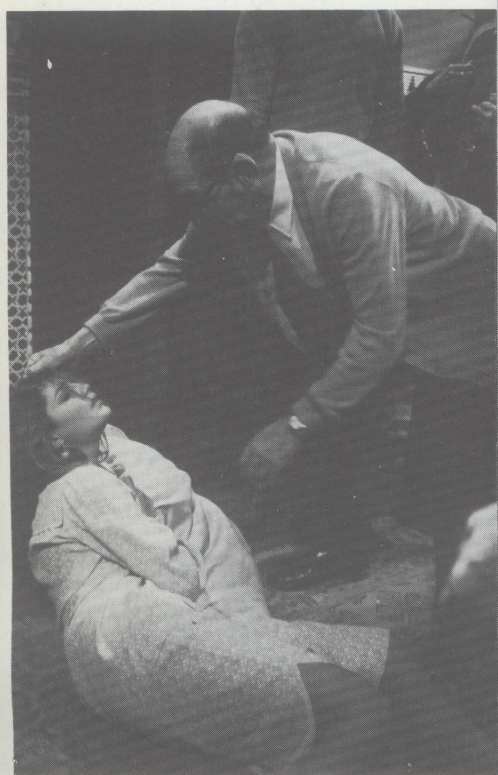
But the racial aspect wasn't the only reason for the remarkable success of the dramatisation of Alex Haley's book. Undoubtedly, the air of plantation melodrama which has been so successful in popular novels and films recently persuaded a number of people to tune in. Certainly, the record cold weather of January and the natural gas 'shortage' drove people to their television sets in greater numbers than usual. Most important, black Americans are not alone in their search for ethnic roots, and it seems likely that millions of white viewers were attracted as much by the saga of immigration and assimilation as by the racial politics. In the last year, ethnic magazines have flowered like ubiquitous ailanthus trees. There are now two magazines devoted to unearthing Italian-American roots, one for Hispanics, a number for Jews (including one strictly for Jewish women). It's only a matter of time before the Scandinavians, Germans, Poles—even the English—join the trend. Haley's next book, *Search*, about his 12-year quest for his roots, promises to be nearly as successful. Now, if some enterprising programming executive would take it upon himself to dramatise Alex Haley's first book—*The Autobiography of Malcolm X*—then we might have a major tele-political event to look forward to! When white America is ready to tune in to Malcolm's story, we will know that *Roots* has borne fruit.

Meanwhile, as the action/adventure series and adult sitcoms of the early 70s continue to fade, Silverman, Segelstein, Grant and their producers scour the bookshops for potential novels. They still appreciate a good spin-off, but the mini-series is obviously entrenched, at least for the next few years. John Ehrlichman's novel *The Company* is currently being filmed, as are *How the West was Won*, Michener's *Hawaii* and *Centennial*, Irving Wallace's *The Word*, Arthur Hailey's *Wheels*, James T. Farrell's *Studs Lonigan* and Hammett's *The Dane Curse* (announced a few years ago as a Claude Chabrol project). More risky series include (somehow) dramatisations of Gail Sheehy's pop psychological study, *Passages*, and Susan Brownmiller's essay on rape, *Against Our Will*. From the evidence so far, none of these will raise much interest. No matter how attractive the novel, the Hollywood television establishment has a way of ironing character flat, simplifying plot to the point of boredom and draining the vitality from settings.

The point once again is that television is an art only at its own risk. Why chance offending any segment of such a massive, quiescent audience? Nothing on American television in years can, for example, match the energy, wit and rough-hewn style of Brooklyn-born Howard Schuman's *Rock Folies* (Thames), recently shown here with no advance publicity by PBS during a fund-raising period. American television isn't worse, it's just different. It's a mass-produced, uniform product with interchangeable parts. Only occasionally does a stubborn quirky talent like Mary Tyler Moore, Norman Lear, Telly Savalas or Peter Falk break through to bring a breath of life to the screen. All four of these, by the way, are quintessential New Yorkers. I think the problem with network television has something to do with California. ■



Luis Buñuel's *Cet Obscur Objet de Désir*

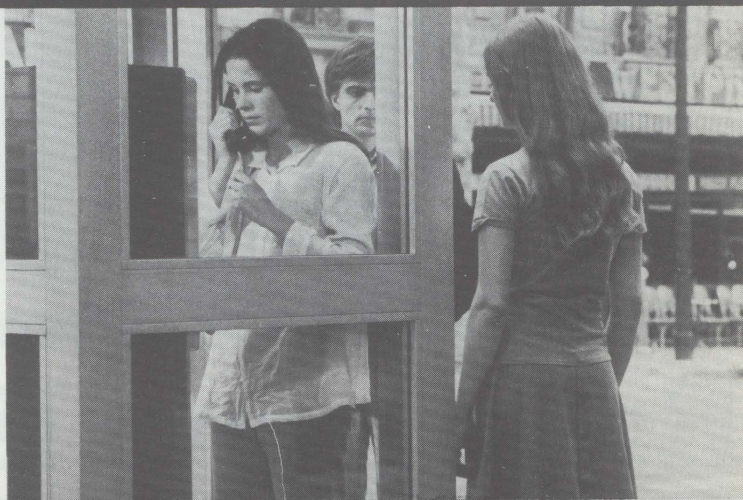


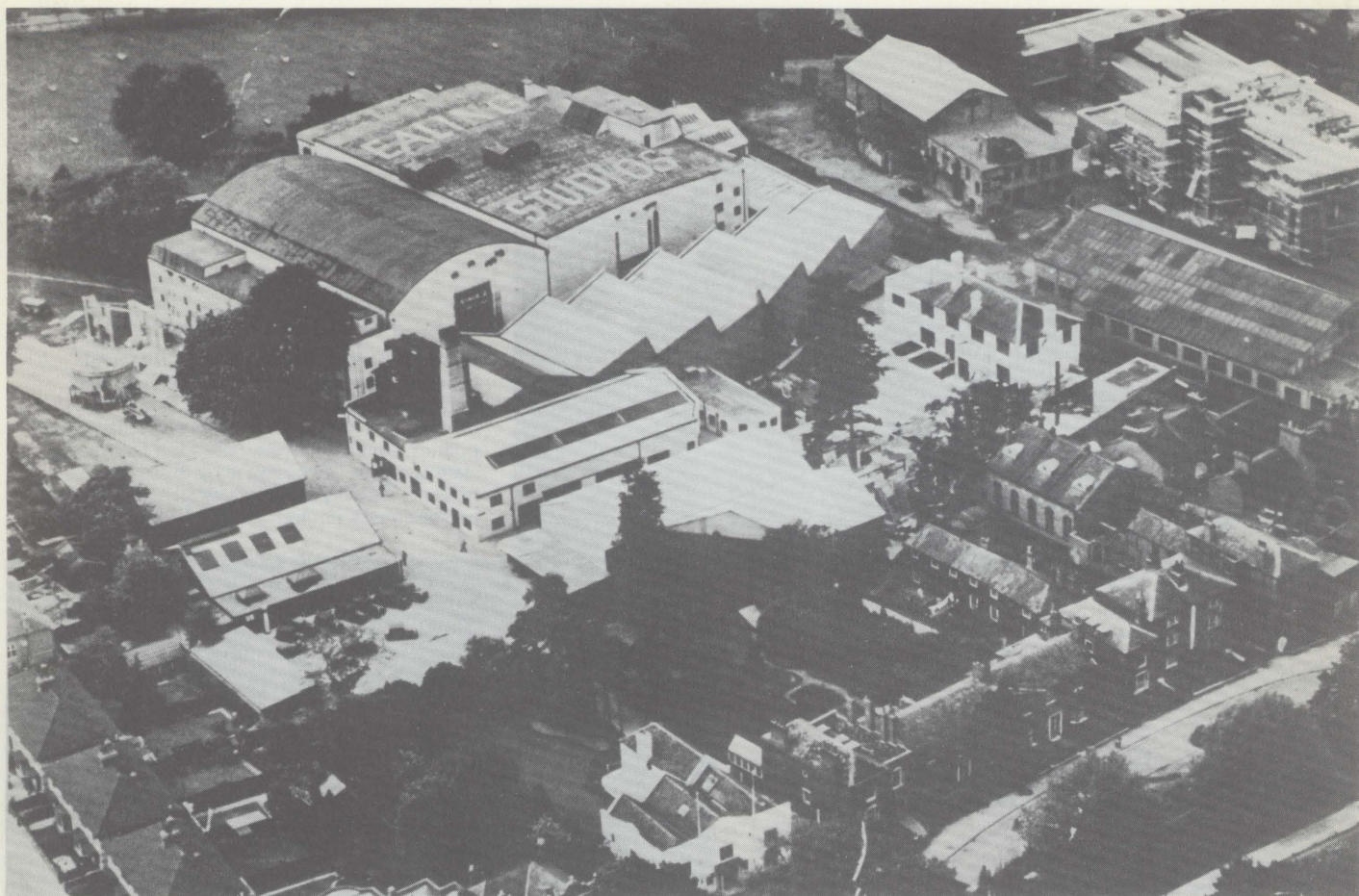
Buñuel's new film is an adaptation of the old Pierre Louys novel *La Femme et le Pantin*, the source also of Sternberg's *The Devil is a Woman*. Fernando Rey heads the cast; Maria Schneider left it, to be replaced apparently by two actresses – Carole Bouquet (top) and Angela Molina (below).



Robert Bresson's *Le Diable Probablement* could be described as a kind of *Pickpocket* in reverse. A young man, adrift in our disorienting society, tests its possibilities – politics, psychoanalysis, faith – but finds no state of grace. The script is by Bresson himself; the players are as usual non-professionals. Photographs: I. Weingarten.

Robert Bresson's Le Diable Probablement





Ealing, your Ealing

Geoff Brown

Even before the Jubilee Year celebrations got under way, the media have been falling over themselves looking backwards at recent British culture and history—usually in a mood of complacent nostalgia, tempered with small amounts of criticism and analysis. Last summer the BBC patted itself on the back after forty years in the television business and invited viewers to revel in past programmes, ranging from an early 50s etiquette lesson, the adventures of *The Grove Family* to *Cathy Come Home*. This year some of us have been reliving—or experiencing for the first time—the 1951

Festival of Britain, the event which tried to offer 'a tonic to the nation' (the title of both the Victoria and Albert Museum exhibition and its accompanying book) and spread the gospel of concrete-tubbed shrubs, spindly chairs and light fittings.

British cinema has come in for attention, though the areas chosen for celebration have been somewhat unlikely. The BBC's long hot summer was also marked by a season of films made at Elstree, in which readers of *Radio Times* were given the chance of choosing the ten films from a round-up of 66, piquantly described by

Philip Jenkinson ('One of the last in a long line of British service comedies'; 'Frankie Vaughan is a Gibraltar fisherman . . .'). George Perry produced a curious volume saluting Pinewood Studios on forty years of movie-making (*Movies from the Mansion*, published by Elm Tree Books). But the craze for looking backwards has finally resulted in something more substantial and rewarding: for the last two months (and for two more to come) Thursday night on BBC-2 has been Ealing night—as is only fit and proper, since Ealing Studios were taken over by the Corporation



in 1955. A token attempt is made at putting the films in perspective, for each film from the studio is prefaced by a Gaumont-British newsreel from the month of its original release, full of the traditional sporting events and royal visits, linked by a commentary read by a voice redolent of pin-striped trousers and port.

Fortunately, far more stimulating material is available elsewhere to place the Ealing achievement historically and critically—Charles Barr's splendid volume *Ealing Studios*, published by Cameron and Tayleur in association with David and Charles (£6.95). At last someone has looked backwards over British culture calmly, sensitively and intelligently, probing beneath its surface familiarity and presenting analyses which are both provocative and level-headed, forcing the reader to look and think anew. The first fruits of Mr. Barr's Ealing explorations were seen in two issues of *Screen* (Spring and Summer 1974); his findings were presented with scholarly rigour, four tables, a bibliography and no pictures. *Ealing Studios*, being designed by Ian Cameron, has plenty of pictures, all excellently chosen and placed in the clean, unfussy manner familiar from *Movie* magazine and *Movie* paperbacks. The author's tone has been agreeably brightened and lightened for the general reader, although one wishes that some of the scholarly apparatus—the bibliography particularly—had been retained, to help other investigators on their way.

In the public eye, of course, Ealing means primarily the Ealing comedies: Ealing being not so much a geographical location as an adjective, whose use conjures up specific images of Alec Guinness in many disguises, small Eiffel Towers made of gold, chases round London bomb sites, the Titfield Thunderbolt chugging down its threatened branch line, Katy Johnson summoning water to make a pot of tea by banging on the pipes and waiting. Over and above such images, the word also evokes a general atmosphere of comedy and a view of English life which could be described by such words as warm, cosy, quaint, whimsical, modest, suburban, parochial, middle-class, middle-aged, timid and tepid (allowing for different people's sympathies).

The comedies were certainly the films which won the studio its firmest friends both here and abroad, and they remain the films which are still most revived in public cinemas. But as the book (and to some extent the BBC season) makes clear, they represent only a small proportion of the studio's total output. Out of ninety-five films produced at Ealing by Sir Michael Balcon, the hard-core comedies amount to nine, and the genre was only properly established in 1949—two years after its isolated founder *Hue and Cry*, and eleven years after Balcon took over from Basil Dean as head of production at Ealing.

A filmography in chronological order of release provides a quick way of filling in the gaps. Here we find the comedies that are rarely, if ever, revived, usually for

excellent reasons (*Fiddlers Three*, *A Run for Your Money*, *Touch and Go*, *Barnacle Bill*). Here are the early 1940s war films, on which Ealing's reputation as a studio with a patriotic urge and integrity was first solidly founded (*Nine Men*, *San Demetrio London*, *The Bells Go Down*). And there are many assorted oddments: a visually bleak version of J. B. Priestley's play *They Came to a City*, in which various people are magically assembled before the gates of a Welfare State Utopia and bore the audience silly debating its pros and cons; rare Technicolor indulgences like *Saraband for Dead Lovers*, an 18th-century romance, and (much better remembered) *Scott of the Antarctic*; the unassuming *Painted Boats*, an hour-long fictionalised documentary about canal folk, with a poetic commentary by Louis MacNeice.

The output, then, was far more varied (both in quality and in subject matter) than one might lazily remember or assume, and Charles Barr's way into it is both bold and simple. Balcon himself provides the key in the wording he chose for the commemorative plaque erected in 1955 when Ealing Studios were sold to the BBC: 'Here during a quarter of a century were made many films projecting Britain and the British character.' As Barr points out, Balcon wasn't being wise after the event in using such terms, for they occur in many earlier pronouncements. In 1939, shortly after assuming control at Ealing, Balcon sent a memorandum to the Government stressing the important part that films could play in binding the nation together in wartime, mixing useful propaganda with entertainment. And the patriotic sentiments of the films themselves were matched by their end titles, which featured a flying Union Jack over which appeared the proud legend 'A British Picture, Made and Recorded at Ealing Studios'. (This identification mark was later replaced by the more familiar sign of two stylised grains of wheat astride the words 'Ealing Studios'—hinting perhaps at Britain's pastoral heritage?)

From the perspective of the 1970s, all sorts of questions follow the studio's national identity. Exactly what kind of Britain were these British Pictures projecting? And did practice always follow theory? Was Ealing a completely corporate concern (signs on the walls read 'The Studio with the Team Spirit', projects were thrashed out at a Round Table, any frayed tempers were knitted together after hours at the Red Lion pub), or do any individual voices, any *auteurs*, stand out? And how far does Ealing's projection of Britain differ from the picture one receives from other British films, from other studios?

Such questions are too large to be satisfactorily treated in a two-hundred-page book scattered with pictures, let alone in a brief article like this. But Charles Barr makes splendid headway, helped by a keen grasp of the general currents in British society from the war years onwards. Ealing's early war films such as *Convoy* and *Ships with Wings*, we discover, are stiff with the attitudes of the officer class (condemned so vividly in George Orwell's *The Lion and the Unicorn*, published in February 1941—a piece which should be required reading for all students of British cinema). But they

gradually begin to capture the wartime spirit of communal endeavour, in which officers and men work together without making heavy weather of class distinctions or patriotic flag-waving or Hun-hating—indeed, without making heavy weather of anything.

San Demetrio London (1943, directed by Charles Frend) is taken as the summation of this mood—and Frend is described in Balcon's autobiography as 'the ideal man to deal with any subject concerning the traditional English values.' It's a fine, fascinating film indeed, which survives technical lapses (a back-projected ocean and some comically inept scenes supposedly taking place in Texas) through its quiet sincerity. Based on a real life event, it tells of an oil tanker struck by German guns while sailing across the Atlantic towards England; the crew take to a lifeboat, only to find the stricken tanker still afloat a few days later. The crew decide to press on for home: 'I look at it this way,' says bo'sun Frederick Piper, arguing with a typical lack of rhetoric. 'We set out to take this petrol to England and we've got it halfway already. Doesn't seem much sense in turning it round and taking it back again.'

The adventure involves much heroism, but it's small-scale, homely heroism. Men are urged on to the lifeboat with the jocular call, 'Anyone for the Skylark?' Once adrift on the studio tank, Charles Victor glumly refuses his tiny ration of food, explaining that he left his false teeth on board the *San Demetrio*—whereupon his neighbour chummily says, 'Never mind, I'll lend you mine when I've finished!' And one of the moments of highest tension is centred around that most British of institutions, duly featured in countless Ealing films—the nice cup of tea. The Chief Engineer (Walter Fitzgerald), seeing the men shivering, goes against his own warnings and strives to brew a pot of tea in the galley to warm them up, despite the strong possibility of gas leaks. He closes up all the hatches and doors and then lights the stove, leaning back cautiously; we then cut to the crew above deck, half expecting to hear the sounds of a mighty explosion as Chief Engineer, galley and kettle meet their fate. But the scene continues undisturbed: Fitzgerald soon emerges smiling, with tea tray, and cups are passed round among the astonished, grateful men.

But what of post-war Britain and its projection? At the beginning of 1945, in an article for *Kinematograph Weekly* (11 January), we find Balcon proclaiming with an embarrassing loudness the need for British films to display 'the true Briton' not only to himself but to the whole world. The world, he says, must be presented with various aspects of the country and its values—they must see 'Britain as a leader in Social Reform in the defeat of social injustices and a champion of civil liberties; Britain as a patron and parent of great writing, painting and music; Britain as a questing explorer, adventurer and trader; Britain as the home of great industry and craftsmanship; Britain as a mighty military power standing alone and undaunted against terrifying aggression.'

It is an amazing passage, particularly because the ideas and hopes in it bear so

Left, above: *Ealing Studios* from the air, in its setting of playing fields and suburban semi-detacheds. Left: 'Kind Hearts and Coronets': the shooting party (Alec Guinness, Dennis Price), en route to another fatal accident



little upon the films Ealing subsequently made. Perhaps the only Ealing film which directly relates to the programme is Charles Frend's *Scott of the Antarctic*, made in 1948 ('Britain as a questing explorer, adventurer and trader')—and that, as Barr points out, is the record of a failed quest, an uncritical celebration of an explorer whose decisions were often hasty and governed by sentimental considerations (he insisted on taking machine-driven sledges, which quickly seized up, rather than taking teams of dogs who would inevitably die and perhaps be eaten to keep others alive). Orwell again comes to mind. The British, he noted in *The Lion and the Unicorn*, have never been fond of military victories but have taken much delight in disasters and retreats: 'The most stirring battle-poem in English is about a brigade of cavalry which charged in the wrong direction.'

Instead, the Britain projected by Ealing in the second half of the 1940s is governed by the same quiet sense of common endeavour conjured up during the war. Films revolve around small communities—the family unit, the pub, the shop, the local halls of entertainment—and the various narrative strands show the society in action. *Pool of London* (1951) deals with merchant sailors on weekend leave; *Dance Hall* (1950) tells the various stories of dance hall habitués; in *The Blue Lamp* (1950) we see the Paddington Green community threatened by violence (never welcome in Ealing's Britain), as the police track down the delinquent killer of P.C. George Dixon with the help of the underworld, who converge on the villain (Dirk Bogarde) at White City Stadium.

Barr spends some time pondering over *The Blue Lamp*, particularly the scene in which Mrs. Dixon (played by Gladys Henson) receives the news of her husband's death—a scene, he says, which is 'central to the twenty years of Ealing production' in its 'balance between "English" restraint and the unembarrassed expression of a grief that can't be contained.' Mrs. Dixon receives the fatal news holding a bunch of flowers picked from George's garden, which she was going to take with her when she visited him in hospital. After being obliquely informed of his death, she says, 'I'd better put these in water,' does so and then begins to weep. It's worth noting, though, that the kind of restraint which the sequence shows—and which Ealing shows in general when dealing with emotion—didn't dominate all British productions of the period. Barr spends little time discussing activities outside the Ealing cloisters, but there are some fruitful paths to explore for comparison.

Gainsborough, in particular, stands out as a suitable case for treatment. The studio commanded the common touch more securely than Ealing: in the late 30s and 40s it produced lowbrow entertainments (Will Hay, the *Crazy Gang*) which were more successful with audiences than their Ealing rivals. And in the mid-40s the Gainsborough Lady began to incline her head daintily before a series of films whose torrid passions should have made her turn

The tanker crew in 'San Demetrio London'; Katy Johnson and guests in 'The Lady Killers'; Gladys Henson and Jimmy Hanley in a quintessential Ealing moment from 'The Blue Lamp'

beetroot with embarrassment. Gainsborough melodramas, vastly popular, promoted all the things Ealing studiously and sometimes awkwardly tried to avoid—outright sex and outright violence. Barr quotes Kenneth Tynan's sharp summary of Balcon's views on sex in films (from his two-part article in *Films and Filming*, November and December 1955): 'His favourite productions—*The Captive Heart*, *Scott of the Antarctic* and *The Cruel Sea*—deal exclusively with men at work, men engrossed in a crisis, men who communicate with their women mostly by postcard. A wry smile, a pat on the head, and off into the unknown: such is Ealing's approximation to sexual content.'

But there's no postcard communication or pats on the head in Gainsborough films like *The Wicked Lady* (1945, directed by Leslie Arliss), where Margaret Lockwood plays the bored wife of a weak, well-meaning Restoration nobleman, who finds new life as a highwaywoman and paramour to James Mason (and displaying enough of her bosom to make the American censors demand that certain scenes be reshot). Yet there is still some English restraint at work, for the passions unleashed are distanced by the film's period setting; what seems passable behaviour in people wearing Restoration costume would, one feels, be far less passable among the contemporary populace dressed in their service uniforms or neat utility outfits. Modern-day Gainsborough romance is notably fatuous and unreal: take Leslie Arliss' previous film *Love Story* (1944), with Margaret Lockwood again as a concert pianist wilting away with a heart ailment and enjoying a last complicated fling with a wounded man from the R.A.F. (Stewart Granger), who is gradually losing his sight.

Ealing prided itself on steering clear of such novelettish twaddle and bestowed scant romantic allure on its heroines, when there were any. Few Ealing women are allowed to approach the Wicked Lady's vampish and gusty spirit. One thinks of Joan Greenwood as the honey-voiced Machiavellian siren Sibella in Robert Hamer's *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (1949). One thinks of Googie Withers. In Hamer's first film as sole director, *Pink String and Sealing Wax* (1945), she appears as a one-woman embodiment of all the delights Brighton can offer to a young lad (Gordon Jackson)—delights denied him in the repressive Victorian household ruled over by Mervyn Johns' chemist. She is the landlord's wife at the Dolphin pub and entraps her doting admirer in a plot to murder her husband; when her guilt emerges, however, she does the decent thing according to society's rules and throws herself off the Brighton sea-front.

Barr rightly singles out Hamer as one of Ealing's best and most intelligent directors (along with Alexander Mackendrick), able to deal sympathetically yet also critically with the values implicitly accepted by 'mainstream' Ealing directors like Charles Crichton, Basil Dearden and Charles Frend. (The scriptwriters can be similarly divided, with T. E. B. Clarke representing Ealing at its most traditional and William Rose providing the critical perspective.) Hamer was specifically alert to the problems of restraining passions in community life, yet *Pink*

String is an awkward exploration of the theme; the stuffiness of Mervyn Johns' household seems to have spread over the entire production, draining even the pub scenes of the energy they should contain. Hamer's subsequent *It Always Rains on Sunday* (1947) provides a much clearer treatment, with Googie Withers giving a



'It Always Rains on Sunday': Googie Withers, John McCallum

splendidly felt performance as a hard-hearted East End mother, Rose, whose past life and affairs are dredged up when a former lover (John McCallum) escapes from Dartmoor and seeks her out. At first he hides in the family's Anderson shelter, left over from the war, but he finally ends up in one of the bedrooms while Rose's husband and two step-daughters are elsewhere. But the call of the community ultimately wins: the fugitive continues his travels and after an unsuccessful suicide attempt Rose resigns herself to the daily round.

As Ealing continues into the 50s, the daily round the films depict becomes more stereotyped, increasingly drained of energy and passion. This becomes particularly clear in the comedies. Hamer's *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, Henry Cornelius' *Passport to Pimlico* (1949), Mackendrick's *Whisky Galore!* (1949) and *The Man in the White Suit* (1951) are all bold, varied and intelligent films, but their successors settle too often for a trivial formula, glorifying that side of the English character which relishes the old, the quaint and the eccentric. And the small; for latter-day Ealing clearly supports the view that life is happier, more satisfying, if the larger issues are forgotten and one simply tends one's own garden—'Small is beautiful'. Mackendrick once told T. E. B. Clarke that he thought *The Titfield Thunderbolt* (1953) failed to achieve the success of its predecessors because few people wanted to run a branch line railway and thus couldn't share vicariously in the characters' lives and aspirations. But to be aware of the problem wasn't to solve it. Mackendrick's own subsequent film as director, *The Maggie* (1954), was centred on an old, threatened, cargo boat; and T. E. B. Clarke went on to write *Barnacle Bill* (1957), which appealed to people who wanted to own a decrepit pier and run it like an ocean liner.

The one comedy from this period which really survives intact is *The Ladykillers* (1955, directed by Mackendrick from a William Rose script); which, as Barr makes clear, deliberately concerns itself with this late Ealing tradition glorifying decrepitude and quaintness. From the credit titles, which unfold over a background of dainty patterned wallpaper, we are enveloped in the dotty Victorian universe of Katy Johnson's Mrs. Wilberforce, living in a small house across the road from St. Pancras where every wall, floor and ceiling seems to be at a slightly different angle (caused, we are told, by subsidence during the war); her parlour is cluttered with parrots, flowers, bric-à-brac and memories from the past. But for all her seeming frailty, she (and her house) casts a tremendous spell—sufficient to put paid to the plans of Alec Guinness' band of crooks, who rent one of her rooms ostensibly to practice the Boccherini minuet on their string instruments.

It's a film full of frustrated action, in which the slow, frail Mrs. Wilberforce consistently wins over the quivering impatience of the crooks, trying to plan and execute their robbery. She constantly interrupts them at their 'rehearsals', offering them tea, or summoning one of them to help her administer medicine to her sick parrot, General Gordon. And any attempt to escape the house and her bothersome presence is doomed. As they stand with their instrument cases ready to leave, a gaggle of other old ladies call for tea, demanding interesting conversation and music. When the crooks finally get outside, their freedom is short-lived: the strap of Danny Green's instrument case catches in the front door and the stolen banknotes are revealed in all their glory as the instrument is yanked free before Mrs. Wilberforce's wondering eyes.

It would be fitting if *The Ladykillers* rounded off Ealing's productions, for it provides a last, deliciously comic testament to the studio's ability to fashion economic movies of quality from English mores. But Balcon's team continued, moving from Ealing to a corner of MGM's studio at Borehamwood, finally ceasing operations with *The Siege of Pinchgut*, released in August 1959. Though Ealing Studios have proved to be unique, a good deal of its manner and personnel has been spread elsewhere, with uneven results. Its late fondness for whimsical comedy certainly exercised a baleful influence on much British production, notably on the films of Group 3 (discussed elsewhere in this issue), though sturdier examples can be found—the Dearden/Ralph/William Rose *Smallest Show on Earth* and the Rose/Cornelius *Genevieve*. And Barr's provocatively brief epilogue points to a strong Ealing influence in British television, where we find ex-Ealing acting talents (Jack Warner, Googie Withers, Gordon Jackson) and well-worn Ealing narrative formats (the institution-based drama) on regular display. 'British television, Britain itself,' he concludes cryptically. 'Si monumentum requiris, circumspecte: if you want a monument to Ealing, look around.' And if you want another monument, buy Charles Barr's *Ealing Studios*.



Richard
Dyer
MacCann

SUBSIDY FOR THE SCREEN GRIERSON & GROUP 3 / 1951-55

In 1949 the Labour Government set up the National Film Finance Corporation, to provide certain government guarantees for independent film-makers in Britain. Lord Reith, former managing director of the BBC, was approached to be chairman of the Corporation, a post which he retained for two years. Through the Board of Trade, whose President was then Harold Wilson, the Government provided lending capital of £5m. Of this amount £3m was loaned to assist one key company, British Lion, distributors for Korda's London Films, most of which disappeared forever. This could not have been altogether unexpected, since the risk was great and the intent behind the Government intervention was primarily to preserve an industry and its jobs.

One aspect of this 'investment' scheme was a special subsidiary company, set up in 1951, called Group 3. Its production costs were very largely tax-supported, and eventually 22 features were completed on budgets averaging £50,000. Unfriendly exhibitors saw to it that these government-subsidised films appeared mostly on the lower half of double bills, and until the final year they received only a demeaning flat fee (not a percentage) at the box-office. Just as the programme showed signs, in 1955, of recovering some of the current costs of production, the experiment was called off.*

The history of Group 3 has never been fully told. It grew out of the general wartime and post-war mood of support for subsidy for the arts, being launched in the same optimistic year as the Festival of Britain. It deserves attention today because it may have been the first full government subsidy for feature film-making in a capitalist country and because it provides a case study of one attempt to develop young talent. The film historian has a special interest in Group 3 for the glimpse it gives of the later career of John Grierson. The movies he supervised were not extraordinary, but they were not negligible; Sir Michael Balcon, company chairman of Group 3, called them 'comedies with comments'. In 1969 the BBC bought the lot from the NFFC and started showing them again on television.

Group 3, in the first instance, was a result of a theory about film production programmes held by Sir Michael Balcon, consultant to the NFFC, and James Lawrie, the banker who was the NFFC's first managing director. The 'group' idea was that new departures could only be accomplished if there was some balancing of risks. Popular movies should subsidise new talent and 'special' films. It was not a new idea, having been practised occasionally and absent-mindedly by major companies for years. King Vidor, in his autobiography *A Tree is a Tree*, reports that Irving Thalberg let him make *The Crowd* because MGM could 'afford' to try something different once in a while. But for independent film-makers to band together, share profits and help each other, especially in England, was an extremely unlikely prospect. United Artists in Hollywood and British Lion in London had had their periods of prosperity, but they also had a tendency to fall apart, especially when prosperous. What independent company, after all, could be expected to take responsibility for experiments with new talent just as it is beginning to turn a profit for the first time?

In the first annual report of the National

*A profit and loss schedule evidently prepared some time after July 1956 gives a production cost of £1,100,972 for the 22 features and £14,321 for short subjects, a total of £1,115,293. Total revenues were £670,700, with a loss of £444,593.



The Grierson influence: 'Man of Africa'

Film Finance Corporation, dated April 5, 1950,* Lord Reith had briskly outlined in some 90 short paragraphs the peculiar difficulties of dealing with movie-makers, especially the so-called independent ones: 'Few independent producing companies are organised to carry out a programme of production with the economies and other advantages of continuity. The Corporation intends to examine the possibility of financing groups of independent producers, working together to achieve these benefits but without sacrificing individuality.' Then came a hitherto unadmitted question, one which may not have been raised in the early conversations among Korda, Wilson and friends. How were 'new talents' to be defined and evaluated? 'It has been difficult to judge the necessary relevant experience. To insist that the individual producer himself had acted as producer of similar films would eliminate new talent. The producer's record and those of his principal associates have been considered as a whole.'

In the second annual report, an appendix contained a letter of January 12, 1951, from Reith to Wilson, outlining the specific proposals which put the Government into the business of developing fresh film-making projects. What Balcon and Lawrie hoped for was a series of co-operative enterprises, supported and steadied by 'the Film Bank' (the NFFC), but committed to the idea of variety and experiment. The Rank Organisation was to develop the first company or 'group', Associated British was to arrange for the second, and the youngest directors among the independents would be recruited for Company 'C' (later called Group 3). Balcon's recollection is that 'little came of the first two'. The 1954 NFFC report says

that 'British Film Makers (established in co-operation with Rank) operated for two years and produced fourteen films', and the Elstree Group (ABPC) 'produced five films'.

'The third company, "C", will be different. The financial difficulties and risks of first feature films make it hard for the young and unknown producer. But his opportunities can be increased by production, in an inexpensive studio and on location, of feature films of moderate cost. Some of the personnel will be those who have been trained in documentaries which have played an important part in British production. The executive leaders of this group will be Messrs. John Grierson and John Baxter; Sir Michael Balcon will be chairman, and a NFFC representative will be on the board of the company. The financial arrangements between each of the members of the group have yet to be worked out. ABFD have agreed to guarantee part of the cost of production, and the films will be distributed by them. But the greater part of the finance will be provided by NFFC.'

Harold Wilson was prompt in his reply. On January 23, 1951, he agreed that 'these proposals appear to me to be covered by the existing powers of the Corporation.' He had 'consulted the Chancellor of the Exchequer and can now inform you that we approve the proposal.'

James Lawrie, managing director of the NFFC until 1954, recalls the uncertainty he felt about the appointment of Grierson. By then something of a world figure, Grierson had presided over the National Film Board of Canada throughout the war, had recommended a similar film programme to the Australian government, had made an attempt to establish an international documentary film company in New York, joined UNESCO for a year and then returned to the United Kingdom to produce films for the Central Office of Information. In the 1930s, he had been the indefatigable philosopher and publicist of the documentary movement as director of the EMB and

GPO film programmes. Grierson's name was proposed from the first for Group 3 and Balcon in particular expressed his 'enormous respect' for his achievements.

At the same time, Lawrie recalls, everyone agreed that Grierson was 'so crazy' that he could never manage a commercial programme of pictures. The record did show, of course, that Grierson knew how to commandeer scarce resources from departmental treasuries, inspire neophyte directors to cut and re-cut their non-fiction projects, and hand-carry the results to specialised non-theatrical groups. But he was always more of a catalyst than a craftsman. He would certainly stir things up—he could be expected to talk for hours on any subject—but would he ever settle down and finish a schedule of 90-minute theatrical productions?

After exhausting the list of possible producers, remembering always the underlying intention to make films 'of some importance', the directors of the NFFC inevitably got round to Grierson again. Lawrie determined to meet this devil-paragon; they had tea at a hotel in Bloomsbury, and Grierson brought along a dirty old envelope covered with proposals. The fabled eloquence flowed again. Sir Stephen Tallents' philosophy of 'the projection of Britain', well remembered from the days of the EMB, could be revived in new forms and for new audiences. How exciting it would be to use regional settings for British features—to rediscover the North Sea and Scotland and Devon—to seek out authors who had never sold their works to films before, and to do all this with documentary directors who could bring something new to theatrical films.

Lawrie came away from that meeting convinced that Grierson was the only man to lead Group 3. The problem—as he and Balcon talked it over—was how to put ballast to the balloon and keep it on course. Cavalcanti had worked closely with Balcon at Ealing during the war, and Balcon knew very well how important he had been in terms of creative management during the latter years of the GPO. His balancing presence had encouraged early experiments with sound and also with the more popular forms of dramatic re-enactment. Could they find a man like that to manage the production side of Group 3 and keep a cool eye on the schedule—someone who knew the commercial world of distribution and the theatrical audience?

John Baxter was a very different kind of man, but a logical choice. He had moved into films as a casting agent, after working in theatre and opera management. Independent producers knew him as a man of conviction; he was asked to lead the deputation that met Harold Wilson and paved the way for the NFFC. His first film as a director, *Doss House* (1933), was a semi-documentary impression of the cheapest places to bed down in London, and some of his other short features had established him as an earthy but optimistic interpreter of ordinary lives—*Song of the Road* (1937), *The Common Touch* and *Love on the Dole* (1941). He was a poor man's Mick Balcon, perhaps, who might not work well with writers but could hold the loyalty of the crews. Lawrie invited him to lunch and told him: 'John Grierson has asked if you would join Group 3 as

*James Lawrie recalled that this first NFFC report came out five days after the close of the financial year, record speed for a public corporation and a matter of pride for Lord Reith. Harold Wilson commented in the House that it was speedier than the Rank Organisation, which being a monopoly 'takes eight months'.

production controller.' Baxter agreed, set up his office at Southall Studio, and waited for decisions on scripts.

They were a long time coming. Grierson, as Baxter put it, simply had no concept of 'the discipline of a script'. His realm was the realm of ideas, and in the old days of narrated documentary it had usually been possible to fix things up in the editing room. Now it was necessary to select themes 'of some importance' expressed through characters with a constructive human outlook, in stories commercial enough to move audiences. There could be no costly settings; location work would suit Grierson well enough. But the dialogue had to be written and rehearsed. Improvisation, Baxter later discovered, was often a documentary director's favourite way out of a hole in the script, but it usually meant costly retakes and poor quality in a sound fiction film. He wanted the traditional beginning, middle and end—for scenes as well as for the script as a whole.

After three or four months of waiting, Baxter wanted to get started on something, so he got permission from Balcon, Lawrie and Grierson to produce and direct a simple thriller called *Judgment Deferred*. Grierson and his friends may well have hoped that all judgments about the potential of Group 3 could be deferred until the second or third production. The Baxter film offered little in terms of a theme. It did have a Dorset coast setting, plus some eccentric characters, but they were merely engaged in bringing to book a dope smuggler who was also running a London night club. *Judgment Deferred* introduced Joan Collins to the film public, a matter of some pride later on for Balcon as well as Baxter, when she went to work for Ealing and for Rank. It also served as a warm-up for the crew, which mattered rather more than Grierson may have realised.

The three Grierson projects which then got off the ground were typical of the twin impulses that drove Group 3 thereafter—the documentary tradition of the 1930s (filtered through the dramatic forms of wartime) and the Ealing Studio tradition of telling comedy, established within the preceding three years but never effectively revived after *The Man in the White Suit* in 1951.

Brandy for the Parson started shooting in July 1951, a month after the start of *Judgment Deferred*. It was also about smuggling, the title being based on a line from Kipling, the rationale on a line in the film: 'There's France not twenty miles away, swimming in the stuff at 15 shillings a bottle, and what do we have to pay for it here? Three pounds or more! A couple on holiday get involved in this intrigue because their boat crashes into Kenneth More's and the girl thinks it would be exciting to help him finish his job. They encounter a menacing boy scout troop, a circus, an old Roman road, and lots of suspicious customs officials before delivering the brandy.

Adapted by John Dighton and Walter Meade from a short story by Geoffrey Household, *Brandy for the Parson* was expected by Grierson to have the zany quality of a Jerome K. Jerome boating adventure. James Donald and Jean Lodge seem to have been more hopeful of the comic

effect of the situations than Kenneth More, who conducts himself with an air of mild resignation. The chase situation is charming but never cliff-hanging, and promising scenes are simply presented, not exploited. But Grierson and Balcon were intent on giving a job as feature director to a promising documentary man, John Eldridge, who had done a very satisfactory dawn-to-dusk essay on Edinburgh called *Waverley Steps*. As a result, there were a large number of beautifully framed shots but not much snap to the comedy.

You're Only Young Twice may have been an attempt to make up for such documentary dawdling, but it made the same mistake twice—hiring a documentary director for a comedy drama. Based on *What Say They?*, a play by the Scottish dramatist James Bridie, a favourite of Grierson's, it was directed by Terry Bishop, who had made an Oscar-winning non-fiction film in Africa, *Daybreak in Udi*. Student rebellions, dances, drunk scenes and other frantic activities served to suggest that things were pretty lively at the northern end of Great Britain. A rough parallel with the story of Esther (the villainous professor is named Hayman, and the girl's father is an unappreciated Celtic poetry professor now serving as a porter at the gate) did not make the film more impressive. Despite a defence of the film in *The Times* by Walter Elliott, the Scottish M.P., as being 'fundamentally about the funny side of the immense seriousness of youth', the reviews were right in calling *You're Only Young Twice* both confusing and unfunny. Richard Winnington of the *News Chronicle* insisted that the 'formation of Group 4 would seem to be an urgent matter.'

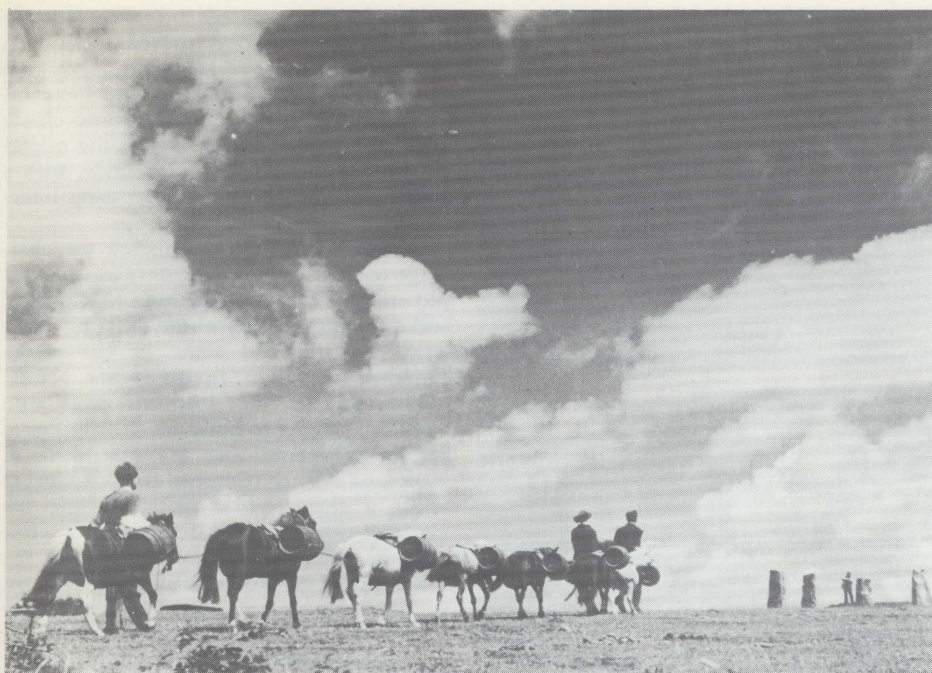
According to the trade press, the fourth Group 3 production was ready for release by Associated British Film Distributors in February 1952. But it was nearly a year before *Time Gentlemen Please* finally surfaced (in January 1953), and its eventual appearance in the lower half of a double bill at the Gaumont Theatre in the West End was a well-kept secret and offered an irony which was to pursue Group 3 productions almost to the end. The *Star* reviewer, noting that the British second feature supported Errol Flynn in *Against All Flags*, added: 'It gets hardly a mention in the front-of-house advertising and was not given a press show. Yet on the night I saw it the audience were laughing their heads off.' At the end they actually gave the film a round of applause.

Based on a novel by R. J. Minney called *Nothing to Lose*, Peter Blackmore's script for *Time Gentlemen Please* was an Ealing-style spoof of bureaucracy, statistics and the ideology of productivity. Little Hayhoe, a town about to be visited by the Prime Minister because it has almost 100 per cent full employment, doesn't know what to do about the single lovable tramp who keeps the record from being perfect. He is finally put in the almshouse. This bothers the custodians, who have hitherto had nobody to bother about, and they inflict on him the indignities of 100-year-old regulations (an echo from *Passport to Pimlico*), only to have the tables turned when a new Irish vicar discovers that an even older local law provides £6,000 for support of residents of the almshouse.

Here again the performances and direction do not match the possibilities even of the rather second-hand situations. The dogged idler's charm is more assumed than evident in Eddie Byrne's playing, and mock villainy in the cameo roles achieves small conflict. But after a slow start, the film moves along briskly enough; Lewis Gilbert at least had directed other dramas, and this film became a stepping-stone for him to later commercial successes—*Sink the Bismarck* and *Alfie* and *You Only Live Twice*. Karel Reisz, in his review for the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, was stirred to unwonted excitement, calling *Time Gentlemen Please* 'quite a nice little film'. It was just nice enough to be suppressed by the exhibitors.

The most praised and best remembered of these early Group 3 productions turned out, logically enough, to be the most nearly documentary in style. *The Brave Don't Cry* was based on an actual coal-mine disaster at Knockshinnoch. Its script by Montagu Slater started with the records of that rescue operation, after more than a hundred men are cut off by a flood and a wall of mud, rock and gas. The film's atmosphere of restrained heroic sacrifice and intelligent effort is almost an epitome of British character as seen in British films. John Gregson, in an early role, represents officialdom in a sympathetic guise: he must explain the slowness of the rescue. Others must wait, both below and above, until finally oxygen equipment is passed in for the last of the trapped men. Philip Leacock, who had already directed *Out of True* and other documentaries, began with this film his transition to feature direction. It represented the most successful of several attempts to give larger opportunities to directors from documentary.

Otherwise, Ealing-style situations tended to recur. In John Eldridge's *Laxdale Hall* (1952), poachers (instead of smugglers) are peripherally involved, and a parliamentary delegation is moved to visit a remote village in the Hebrides because a group of five people, the only car owners in town, refuse to pay their road tax until they get a road. Other high jinks involve a threat of blackmail and an outdoor performance of *Macbeth* on a suitably stormy night. *The Oracle*, which received more lively reviews, was based on a Grierson premise that successful prediction of future events would spoil things for everybody. When a reporter discovers a voice at the bottom of a well on a remote Irish island, he tries to keep his job by publishing some of the predictions, but discovers that the whole national business of horse-racing declines in the face of such telepathy, much as the textile business shuddered at and finally foiled *The Man in the White Suit*. Richard Winnington, still no friend of these low-budget films, objected to the 'back-breaking whimsy' and 'soda-and-milk satire, which one hoped had been fully exhausted by Ealing Studios.' Ealing was echoed again in John Guillermin's *Miss Robin Hood*, with its plot about the recovery of a stolen formula for whisky making, although the dry characters and authentic locales of *Whisky Galore* were inadequately replaced by Margaret Rutherford in a modern story actually wearing Robin's traditional costume.



On these first eight productions, completed in a year and a half, the pattern of producer credits was essentially the same: John Grierson was 'executive producer' and John Baxter 'production controller'. After that the credits reflected a house politely divided. In late August of 1952 the trade papers carried a notice that Grierson had resigned as executive producer and would concentrate on two or three personal productions; Baxter became 'managing director' of Group 3.

With the move to Beaconsfield Studios in 1953, Grierson and Baxter had less and less to do with each other. Their offices in fact were far apart on the studio lot. Baxter recalls that Grierson was often not around and later was in hospital and at home for a period of nearly a year. Individual producers emerged—Alfred Shaughnessy, Sidney Cole, Don Taylor (Grierson's brother-in-law, who nevertheless worked mostly under Baxter) and Herbert Mason (credited with three films).

From 1953 to 1955, a majority of the Group 3 films were modest stories with a soap opera flavour about family relationships or problems of growing up. *Devil on Horseback*, a Grierson project directed by Cyril Frankel, had traces of documentary feeling in its atmosphere of training stables and horse racing. A story of a 14-year-old jockey who has to overcome his own selfishness and arrogance to win the right to ride again, it was suggested by press stories about a youngster named Lester Piggott. *Child's Play* was Grierson's effort to connect the atomic threat with common experience: two precocious 11-year-olds follow the example of their fathers, scientists at an atomic research station, by splitting some radioactive rocks as they plot against the local policeman. This was the only Group 3 film directed by a woman, Margaret Thomson.

In *End of the Road*, Finlay Currie is an old man, retired from his job and rejected by his family, who finds a way to work again. In *The Blue Peter*, Kieron Moore is a Merchant navy officer back from Communist imprisonment in the Korean war; he regains a sense of purpose by training a group of twelve youths for sea duty (one of them a 'dead end' kid played by Anthony Newley). In *Background*, Valerie Hobson and Philip Friend play a couple about to be divorced who are persuaded by their children to stay together.

John Baxter's direct contributions to this declining period tended towards fantasy or farce, but were sometimes ingenious, as in the case of *John and Julie* (written and directed by William Fairchild), in which two children run away from home to see the Coronation; the climactic footage is simply spliced in from official films. *The Angel Who Pawned Her Harp* gets involved, Capra-style, with needy and troubled people, old and young. *Double Cross* is about a poacher (once more) who becomes entangled with a foreign spy. *Orders Are Orders*, a broad and confusing farce about a science fiction film being shot at a military barracks, depends on the charms of women to get the co-operation of the men, including the commanding officers. *The Love Match*,

'Brandy for the Parson'; Diane Cilento in 'The Angel Who Pawned Her Harp'; Michael Medwin (later to become one of our more enterprising producers) and Louise Hampton in 'The Oracle'

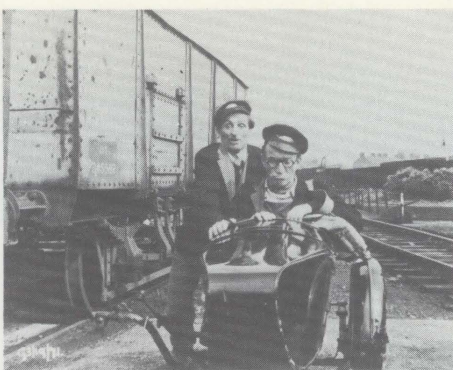
based on a play of the same name, and starring Arthur Askey, is an episodic tale about a pair of Lancashire railway workers who are avid football fans; it took in a good deal of money at the box-office.

Baxter's hand was steadiest in the case of a smooth and somewhat offbeat story about an antique dealer, *Make Me an Offer*. Directed by Cyril Frankel, who had been working with Grierson, and starring a then little-known actor named Peter Finch, it manages a modest degree of suspense as well as finesse in the search for a long-lost vase, unique perhaps for this kind of story in that it has no money or jewels hidden inside. Some of the inside abracadabra of antique judging and bidding is explored, however, and Adrienne Corri (previously in Jean Renoir's *The River*) provides a glamorous red herring for this Eastman colour production.

Meanwhile Herbert Mason produced and John Eldridge directed (also in colour) the film which perhaps comes nearest to the model of entertaining seriousness that Group 3 was struggling so hard to achieve. *Conflict of Wings* (written by Don Sharp and John Pudney from a novel by Sharp) is a case study of conflict between one government mission and another. Its message is clear and obvious: a local bird sanctuary is about to be taken over by an RAF jet fighter squadron as a rocket firing range. The story proceeds with reasonable economy (despite a languid romance between an RAF corporal and a local girl who wants to keep the sanctuary), arriving at the inevitable but well-edited filmic climax of a Dunkirk-style demonstration by a swarm of boats right in the path of the first target-seeking planes. There is a very British even-handedness about it—the remembered RAF heroism of the war years naturally demands an equally solid argument on the other side. This reduces the drama almost to zero and the climax to a visual exercise. John Gregson and Kieron Moore were in this admirably prophetic film, with Muriel Pavlow and Niall MacGinnis on the side of the birds.

There remain two films of special importance which must be only briefly dealt with here. One is the highly successful filmed record of *The Conquest of Everest*. Here the contribution of the executives of Group 3 was the foresighted decision to pay the cost—to get what footage was possible, knowing that the risk depended on the fortunes of the expedition. The climb was, of course, a Commonwealth achievement and the film (a production of Countryman Films) recalled the beginnings of documentary in England as publicity for empire trade. *Conquest of Everest* was also one of the few documentaries in any decade able to draw its own audience at commercial theatres. Group 3 realised its top income from this film: £130,635 (according to a 1957 balance sheet) on a production outlay of £34,590, a profit of £96,045.

Man of Africa, on the other hand, was a failed effort. Originally called *Kigesi*, the project had its origins in the immediate post-war period, when Grierson was supervising films for the Central Office of Information. Helen de Moulpied (who became the wife of Denis Forman, later managing director of Granada TV) was intensely interested in African problems and saw a valuable film



Acting for Group 3. Arthur Askey in 'The Love Match'; Margaret Rutherford as 'Miss Robin Hood'; Adrienne Corri, Ernest Thesiger and Peter Finch in 'Make Me an Offer'; Edie Martin and Hermione Baddeley in 'Time Gentlemen Please'; Sid James and Tony Hancock in 'Orders are Orders'

project in efforts towards soil conservation in Uganda. When Grierson moved to Group 3, he brought Cyril Frankel along to work on this as a feature. With Montagu Slater as screenwriter, it became a dramatic enactment of a way of life, following the migration of a hill tribe to the lowlands, with a special sub-theme about overcoming inter-tribal prejudice.

In 1961, Frankel remembered the challenge of this semi-documentary as 'the best picture I've ever had anything to do with,' and as a film that was 'ahead of its time'. In 1973, he still had some of the cables Grierson sent him twenty years before, asking for specific reaction shots and additional angles to build up the rhythm of certain sequences. For the first issue of *Films and Filming* (October 1954), Grierson wrote a characteristic piece praising the Colonial Office for not demanding a script and the director for making 'one of the most important works since Flaherty.' In an adjoining column was a brief review reluctantly approving the non-professional players but rejecting the music as 'incessant', the continuity as 'jumpy', and the production as lacking in 'firmness': another shortened version 'might have a chance with people who like films of travel.'

The 74-minute version of *Man of Africa* shown at the Edinburgh festival was drastically compressed later to 44 minutes. The missing 30 minutes seem to have included what Grierson thought was 'the most poignant moment in the film, when a negro baby is dying and a little pygmy foster-mother is brought in to save its life.' If the shorter version was worse than the original, any blame evidently lies with Sir Michael Balcon, who by 1954 was no longer happy with Grierson as a feature film producer. (He resigned as chairman of Group 3 in June.) According to Frankel, Balcon said the picture was 'terrible', and would have to be re-done, which meant sacrificing the parts Grierson thought were 'lyrical'.

I have not seen either version, but it seems to me unlikely that the Grierson-Frankel combination could have brought about a film in the Flaherty tradition even under the best of conditions. Only once before in his career had Grierson fostered a documentary of this sort: Basil Wright's extraordinary and beautiful *Song of Ceylon*. Frankel's later record, while busy and fruitful in a commercial setting (*She Didn't Say No*, 1958; *Don't Bother to Knock*, 1961; *The Trygon Factor*, 1967), offers no hint that he was drawn to or suited for this kind of enterprise. In fact, *Man of Africa* may well have been a reverse case of miscasting—a director with theatrical skills sent on a documentary errand, as documentary directors had been put to work on light comedies.

The whirl of activity Group 3 represented must have been attractive to Grierson after his frustrating time at the Central Office of Information. He was never comfortable being addressed as 'Dr. Grierson' or 'the father of British documentary'. When one looks again at the trenchant reviews of feature films he wrote during the 1930s, it is not really surprising that he became in 1952 a shaper of story forms for an entertainment medium. Did he have a vision of one or two outstanding Group 3 successes

which might lead him into commercial production? His bout with tuberculosis cut him off just when he might have taken that chance—had there been anyone in England who was interested.

His involvement, at least during the first year, was intense. Alfred Shaughnessy—who afterwards went on to be a screenwriter and television script editor, most notably for *Upstairs, Downstairs*—recalls two sharp encounters. Shaughnessy had come over from Ealing along with the script of *Brandy for the Parson*. One day he brought Grierson a copy of *Spotlight*, with its gallery of available professional actors, pointing out someone he had in mind for the small role of a Customs agent. Grierson took the book and threw it at the wall. 'That's what's wrong with British films!' he exclaimed. Group 3 was going to seek out real people, unknown faces, not the tired old actors everybody recognised. After production began, Grierson paid a brief visit to Devon and watched the shooting 'for about ten minutes, then went off and talked to some fishermen for an hour.'

'You couldn't not listen to Grierson,' Shaughnessy continues, with some asperity. 'He would put his feet on the desk and say, "You've got a sweet picture here, boys." Then he'd sail into it. I had a blazing row with him over one sequence. My editor supported me. I finally left him in the projection room and went to a pub. He found me there and smoothed it over, claiming he was testing me and was glad I felt strongly enough to get angry in defence of my position.'

Cyril Frankel counters that 'too many people took Grierson literally. You had to get the general trend of what he was saying and then make your own decision. He was always trying to get the best out of you. He would say, "Be a professional." Of course he was a stimulus, an inspiration, not a film-maker himself. Once for *Devil on Horseback*, he actually sat down and wrote some great long pages of dialogue. They didn't work at all.'

A post-mortem on Group 3 tends to focus on such questions as: Why didn't it last longer? Why wasn't it a 'success'? Objections by Rank and even by independent producers to government 'competition'—that's what killed Group 3, Balcon suggests. 'The chaos inside hurt more, the dual control of Grierson and Baxter,' says Lawrie. This was not apparent at the meetings, according to Balcon: 'There were no big rows, just a struggle to agree.' Nevertheless, 'Baxter was an old world character and Grierson was flamboyant, a missionary.' Eventually he was a bit too flamboyant for Sir Michael as well. Frankel, who idolised Grierson, admits that he was likely to say one thing in a meeting and then decide it was better to do something else, and Balcon naturally found this intolerable.

Another difficulty was the Ealing connection. Although it was assumed that Group 3 was going to emulate in some degree the situations and house style of the Ealing comedies, sometimes it seemed that Group 3 was not supposed to be successful at it. Stella Jonckheere, who left Ealing's story department to be story editor at Group 3, says that more than once she remembered a favourite script from the file,

made a deal to buy it, and was then informed that Balcon, impressed by this activity, wanted it back. Frankel recalls that Balcon even tried to get Grierson to stop production on *Devil on Horseback* because Ealing was making a similar story, *The Rainbow Jacket*. Neither side gave way; the Group 3 picture got better reviews.

Balcon himself gives as one reason for his resignation the fact that he had 'too much power'. He was production head of Ealing, associated with Rank through his distribution contract, adviser to the NFFC, and chairman of Group 3. No doubt he had had more than tentative hopes that some of the directors, writers, and stars trained at Group 3 might move up to Ealing and strengthen his programme. But as it turned out, Ealing as well as Group 3 stopped producing films on their home ground in 1955, when the studio was sold to the BBC, although there were to be half-a-dozen more Ealing pictures under their MGM contract before production finally ceased in 1959.

From a shorter-range view, any judgment of the 'success' of Group 3 must compare the production record with the odds against it. In spite of the different temperaments of Baxter, Grierson and Balcon, 22 films were finished. Grierson knew that he was far removed from the pioneering excitement of the early 30s. Balcon was increasingly aware of the decline in the 'family atmosphere' of Ealing. Yet their experimental spirit was mutually supportive for two years, and after that the loyalty and persistence of Baxter carried the programme into a phase that approached commercial success. *The Love Match* made a profit (on percentage bookings) of £34,000 and *The Conquest of Everest* made £96,000. But Balcon, Grierson, and even Lawrie (who left to produce a film called *Pacific Destiny*) were gone. Baxter got a phone call one day and that was the end.

By 1955 widescreen techniques were giving British film distributors a brief boost, and at the same time television was beginning to employ film people, both old and new. David Kingsley, the new managing director of the NFFC, commented on these points in a talk to the Association of Cine-Technicians, published in *Films and Filming*, August 1955. 'As a training organisation, Group 3 has a record of success,' he said, but financial troubles finally led to a decision 'to abandon its policy of continuous production.' There might be opportunities to 'go on the floor when suitable projects present themselves.' Since projects never 'present themselves' but have to be fought for in financial arenas by real people with passionate convictions, the heady experimental hopes of 1951–52 were clearly over.

Group 3 had employed as actors Peter Finch, Peter Sellers, Kenneth More, Robert Shaw, John Gregson, Joan Collins, Diane Cilento, Donald Pleasance, Margaret Rutherford, Finlay Currie, Kieron Moore. The discovery of actors, Grierson to the contrary notwithstanding, was more notable than the development of directors, but the list is still quite impressive: Lewis Gilbert, John Guillermin, Cyril Frankel, Philip Leacock, Wolf Rilla. Such producers as Alfred Shaughnessy (*Upstairs, Downstairs*), Colin Lesslie (*Tunes of Glory*) and Donald Wilson (the BBC *Forsyte* series) continued

to be active. John Addison went on to be a leading composer for films at Woodfall and elsewhere.

The idea behind Group 3 was to make 'B' pictures—and even 'C' pictures if need be—in order to encourage new talent and contribute to the rebuilding of British feature film production. These were reasonable goals; they were not expected in themselves to be profit-making. As in other sectors of the economy, public money would pick up the slack because private money could not do the job. But the project looked strange in the 50s because everybody still thought there were huge profits in feature films and that the movie business above all others shouldn't need government handouts.

Inside the movie business there was no sensitivity whatever to the laboratory possibilities of Group 3 in a declining industry. John Davis, for example, could apparently only see Group 3 as socialism, not as subsidy for the screen. Therefore the Rank Organisation, instead of being supportive, was unhelpful. According to a story in the trade paper *The Cinema*, Davis, a delegation of independent producers, and the top executives of the British Film Producers Association met with Lawrie and Balcon as early as October 20, 1953, to protest the continued existence of Group 3.

Hindsight suggests plainly enough that if Harold Wilson had really wanted a socialist subsidy for art in the movie business, he would have had to go further and provide for distribution and exhibition as well as production, to protect the investment. But of course the future focus of film subsidy in Britain and in Europe was to be television, not theatres. BBC-TV, fully equipped as distributor, was already taking on the new competition of independent television in 1955; today the foreground is dominated by the BBC—that accepted, respectable, occasionally loved, licence-subsidised 'group', which every year develops filmed dramas and new talent in carload lots. And which, 20 years later, was still showing on Sunday afternoons the films of a short-lived experiment with subsidised production, Group 3. ■

Research for this study of Group 3 was made possible by a senior fellowship of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Washington, D.C. It was based primarily on three elements: (1) interviews in the spring and summer of 1973 with John Terry, chairman of the NFFC, James Lawrie, then a member of the Civil Aviation Authority, Edgar Anstey, Cyril Frankel, Stella Jonckheere, Alfred Shaughnessy, and repeated interviews with Sir Michael Balcon and John Baxter; (2) viewings of *Brandy for the Parson*, *Time Gentlemen Please*, *You're Only Young Twice*, *The Brave Don't Cry*, *Orders Are Orders* and *Make Me an Offer at the British Film Institute*, and of *Devil on Horseback*, *The Blue Peter* and *Conquest of Everest* on television; (3) studies of reviews and production news reports in the BFI files, plus annual reports of the NFFC. It might be observed that it is difficult to pinpoint the dates and even the order of production of Group 3 films either from annual reports or from the trade papers.

SURVIVING



John Russell Taylor

Alfred Hitchcock

In what they do and how they do it, two film-makers could hardly be less alike than George Cukor and Alfred Hitchcock. Even the personal style: Hitchcock massive and stately of utterance, formally dressed in his uniform dark suit and tie; Cukor spry and talkative, anything but grand despite the classic Hollywood grandeur in which he lives. Of course, they are both very funny and practical to talk to. They have both been around a long time, and are still busy, with no signs of slackening off. They are both, curiously, working on projects which are being written by James Costigan, who is just completing the script of Cukor's *Vicky* (he also wrote *Love Among the Ruins*) and just starting on the script of Hitchcock's *The Short Night*. They are both 78 in August, Cukor on the 7th, Hitchcock on the 13th. And they are both, above all, survivors in Hollywood.



At Universal it was a mild, flat, sunny afternoon. The sort of day a crop-duster might suddenly come at you out of the empty sky. I recognised immediately the stocky white figure of Sarah, the Hitchcocks' pet Scottie, being ceremonially walked by a secretary, signifying that the master was in residence—and Mrs. H. too, as it transpired. Regular as clockwork, whether he has some immediate project on hand or not, Hitchcock puts in a 9 to 5 day at the studio, reading properties, screening movies to check on the work of actors or technicians he might possibly be interested in using, and generally keeping a fatherly eye on the regulation of his little empire. And in any case, he has just announced a new project in the works, *The Short Night*, based on Ronald Kirkbride's novel suggested by the escape of George Blake, plus Sean Burke's non-fiction account of the same happenings, *The Springing of George Blake*. The champion survivor, evidently, is in fine shape: the only major director of the silent cinema who is still an unshakeable part of the film-making scene today.

In the last 50 years you have made some 53 films. What has driven you?

First and foremost, it's a case of the cobbler sticking to his last. I think you have a sort of instinct which pushes you towards what you can do best, and once you have found it, it becomes a habit to keep on doing it. And it's too late to start at the other thing I would really have liked to do, being a criminal lawyer. I'd have really liked that—not, you know, the histrionic type like Marshall Hall or the smooth, charming type like Curtis-Bennett. But I've spent so much of my life fascinated by crime and the administration of justice. That

Hitchcock on location for 'Family Plot'; Cukor with Ava Gardner, who plays Luxury in 'The Blue Bird'

was never really a choice, though: I left school at the age of 14, went into engineering drawing and from there by a succession of logical steps into the cinema. I was reading Buchan and Chesterton then (even as a child I never cared much for Sexton Blake and the lower orders), and all the real-life crime stories I could get hold of, but it never occurred to me as a practical possibility that my professional life might take that turn.

Why not the theatre?

When people ask me why I don't direct a play, I always answer that I wouldn't know where to begin. Until recently I've gone to the theatre constantly, but I've managed to keep my innocence. I don't know how an actor projects, I don't know when he should have his back to the audience, and there's something boring to me about the idea of working within that constant fourth wall of the proscenium arch. Also, in the theatre the writer is paramount, he is always there in the stalls, he is the final arbiter. In films the director has the last word.

Nearing 78, you are as busy as ever and obviously have no thought of retiring. What drives you now?

I have a contract with Universal that has to be fulfilled: two more movies. But basically, I can't help it. I need to go on. I could never retire. That seems to me the most horrible idea. What would I do? Sit at home in a corner and read? I have no outside interests, I've done all the travelling I want to do. Also, you have to remember that as well as being a creative person I am a very technical person. The actual exercise of technique is very important to me, the practical solution of technical problems. I have always needed to do things, never had much taste for philosophising about what I do.

Has there ever been anything specific you wanted to say in your films?

Now we're back to Sam Goldwyn, aren't we?—messages are for Western Union. Of course in each specific subject there is something I want to say, in the sense that there is something which attracts my interest and I want to bring that out in my treatment of the subject. It may be something technical, as in *Family Plot*, where it was the structural image of those two separate plots and separate groups of characters coming gradually, inevitably together, and how to do that and to make it seem completely natural. In *The Short Night* it's a situation that fascinates me: the man falls in love with the wife of a man he's waiting to kill. It's like a French farce turned inside-out. If he sees a boat coming across the bay with the husband on it, he can't hop out of the back window, he has to wait and do what he has to do. And of course he can't take the wife, who loves him, into his confidence. And so the whole romance is overshadowed by this secret, which gives it a special flavour and atmosphere. That's what I want to convey.

Tell me more about *The Short Night*.

I read a review of the novel somewhere, and was struck by this idea. The central action takes place on an island off the coast of Finland, near where Sibelius was born. It's where Blake's wife with their two children waited for him to come and collect

them once he'd got out of England, and take them into Russia with him. That's where the man who is stalking him comes also in Ronald Kirkbride's novel, and where he and the wife fall in love while they are waiting. The end of the film is a big traditional chase: the wife won't go with the spy, so he kidnaps his children and gets on the train for Russia from Helsinki, and the other man has to pursue the train, get on it somehow and get the children away from him as well as killing him if he can before they reach the border.

The beginning comes from the non-fiction book by Sean Bourke, who actually engineered Blake's escape. The details of that are incredible: they sound as though they came straight out of a movie. Bourke and Blake communicated by a walkie-talkie that had been smuggled into the prison. Hammersmith hospital is right next to the prison, and Bourke used to stand outside it on visiting days with a bunch of flowers wired for sound, into which he would talk to Blake. They finally got him out over the wall one night when there was a film show in the prison, with all kinds of delays, and then hid him three minutes away until the fuss had died down. But the main thing is the love story. I went to look at the island. It has a few low scrubby trees, very bleak and windswept, but there are lots of reeds in shallow water all round. I thought what an interesting image it would be to shoot a chase there from slightly above, so that you can't see the men at all, just the movements of the reeds as they almost converge, then get further apart, neither knowing where the other is...

Do you ever fear the competition of your own past?

Inevitably, sometimes. But probably less the longer you're at it. Look at that young man Spielberg, making the biggest money-maker ever so early in his career. How was he going to top that? I find the thing to do is to concentrate entirely on the film in hand; and say to yourself, it's only a movie.

Are there purely practical problems about continuing in Hollywood much after the age of 60—insurance, for instance?

I suppose so, but luckily I haven't encountered them. My health is pretty good, despite a few arthritic aches and pains. I have a heartpacer, but that works more reliably than nature. And my films are sufficiently successful for other people to want me to go on working, which is a lot of the battle.

Is there anything you regret not having done?

Being a criminal lawyer, maybe. And some movie ideas that I haven't yet been able to incorporate into a workable screenplay. And *Mary Rose*, which I really wanted to do, but they didn't want to let me. Do you know, it's written specifically into my present contract that I cannot do *Mary Rose*?

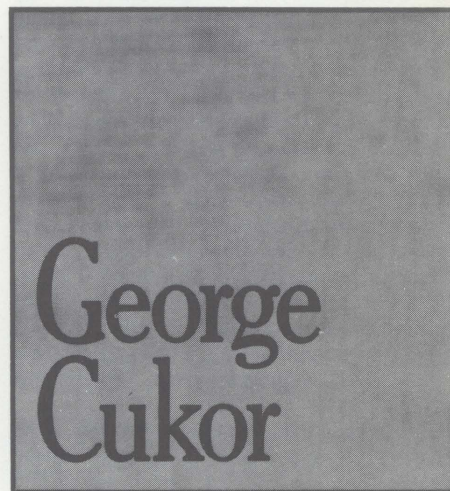
To survive in the film business it would seem you have to be tough. Are you tough?

I don't know. In a business sense, I don't think so, particularly. Instead of being tough, I have usually been devious. Present people with a *fait accompli*, or if I want to turn down their ideas come up with a valid alternative right away, so that it is not a head-on collision. I think the only area where I am tough is in the preparation stage

of my films: I never give up until things are right. It takes so long, and so much work, to achieve simplicity. And I've always felt that if you're tough with yourself, in the strictly professional sphere, the rest takes care of itself.

And after *The Short Night*, what?

Good heavens, I don't know. I have lots of ideas that I've never yet managed to get on the screen, and something always comes up, some new story that excites me. I warn you, I mean to go on for ever!



The weather in the glen above Sunset Strip where George Cukor lives seems to hold no menace. The house, with its Italianate garden and the pool in which (carefully reproduced in the studios at Fox) we caught our last-ever screen glimpse of Marilyn, relaxes behind its high wall like the setting for one of Cukor's own elegant social comedies, soaking up the afternoon sunlight. But the climate in Los Angeles can be deceptive. Scarcely have we settled on the long curved sofa in the bay window of Cukor's famous leather-lined room, coolly surveyed by a Braque, a Rouault and a Sutherland, than it begins to darken, and in the next half-hour we are in for a gothic extravaganza. Thunder rolls around the hills, lightning flashes, there is a torrential downpour; and then it all clears away as rapidly as it came, leaving us aureoled in golden sunlight. Not at all like a Cukor movie, but as he observed with suitable modesty, once a director, always a director. 'You don't think it was an accident, do you, that when I was inveighing against phony-boloney film scholars my words were reinforced by the first thunderclaps. And of course the clouds clear away and the sun comes out when my wrath is spent and, a beatific smile playing about my lips, I let them all go in peace. I tell you, kiddo, you learn a thing or two at MGM.'

Apart from the spectacular *mise en scène*, the purpose of my visit was to talk about survival and Cukor's new film *Vicky*, a biography of Victoria Woodhull designed for Faye Dunaway, which should start shooting some time in the summer.

In the last 40-odd years you've made about 50 films. What has driven you?

Money! No, I don't know. Recently some silly woman asked me, 'And have you found

your bluebird of happiness?' I said 'Yes—I've found two bluebirds.' The first bluebird was that in my innocence and ignorance I felt a drive towards the theatre. I knew nothing about it to begin with, but I was totally stage-struck. I had no idea what a director did, but I knew that was what I wanted to be—I suppose I got the idea that he told other people what to do, and that sounded appealing. At that time the movies were not thought much of. I remember I had some highbrow friends, and their mother loved the movies, used to read the movie magazines; we thought that was very comic. At the same time I was seeing movies—at the corner of 68th Street and Third Avenue there was a small, nothing movie-house which still exists, a long brick building, and I saw most of what was around. But then it was the theatre, always the theatre. I was a stage manager (and a damned good one), then I ran a stock company in Rochester, I worked with Gilbert Millar, then I was directing. I got to direct Ethel Barrymore, Laurette Taylor, and I never got over the excitement of feeling that I was actually friends with and directing people that only a few years before I had been watching from the second balcony.

Then came the talkies, and we were sent for. I had never been passionately interested in the movies, but I saw a few possibilities; it was nothing like as impressive as the theatre to me. I had no regrets about coming to Hollywood, though. I had had a very good 10 or 11 years in the theatre. And I remember feeling, the first time I set foot in Los Angeles, just as I had felt the first time I went to Rochester, that this was good luck. I liked California—not the beauty of it, but the activity. The theatre was then going through a lean period, and here they were making all these pictures. A mystery to me, of course—the whole movie thing was very mysterious, but then it was a mystery to a lot of other people too. It was like the Red Sea parting. And I was interested and stimulated. So I transferred my allegiance from the theatre to the movies, never thinking that all these things would one day be very respectfully researched and assessed by scholars. Even rather revolutionary young people, after the first reaction of 'Oh Christ, he's still alive!', go through all the stuff about how they can't believe they're talking to the man who made this or that movie a million years ago. But you see how lucky I was; I had an idea of what I wanted to do, right or wrong, and I got to do it. Then, at the psychological moment, I got another idea, and here, 80 years and a 100 movies later, or whatever you said, I'm still doing it, still excited, never bored by my work.

Have you ever regretted the theatre?

No regrets at all. I had a good life in the theatre, which did not go on too long. And I was lucky to be working in the theatre in a golden age, which rather rapidly came to an end after (though not of course because) I left. I did have one disastrous experience when I was persuaded back to direct *The Chalk Garden* before New York. But you know now I find that the theatre, unless it is transcendently good (which it seldom is, though occasionally with Gielgud and Richardson in *No Man's Land*, or Kate

Hepburn in the Enid Bagnold play, it can be glorious) tends to bore me. It all seems so tatty.

What drives you now?

Still the excitement, still the irrepressible urge to tell people what to do. And of course the happy fact that new projects are always being offered to me which bring challenges, direct me into new areas of interest.

Is there anything specific you have wanted to say in your movies?

Oh no! If you do your work, you do everything. You express yourself, you get paid, you do everything. All this attitudinising is peripheral. And I defy you to do a good job and not get money for it. (Of course some shrewd people make a hell of a lot more money than the rest, and I don't despise that.) But when they talk about freedom to express your own ideas, to follow your inspiration untrammelled by commercial considerations, and so on, I think they're talking about a fantasy. I remember once at RKO I was waiting in an outer office to see Pandro Berman, a little after hours, so all the secretaries had gone home. And the only other person there was Jerome Kern. A little bird-like man he was—not too friendly a bird. And he was sitting at a desk in a very matter-of-fact way writing music. I knew him very slightly, but I couldn't resist going over to him, seizing the pen from his hand and saying 'No, no, Mr. Kern. That's not the way you write music at all. Let me show you. You scribble a note or two. No, that's not it. You're in despair. You clutch your head, your eyes roam wildly. Suddenly, yes, it's inspiration, and you turn again to your paper, writing feverishly. That's how you do it. You don't just sit at a desk, as though you were writing a letter.'

He obviously thought I was crazy. But that's the sort of fantasy of a film-maker's job that so many serious young people today mistake for the truth. Talking rather than doing is the big thing today. When I came out here, people were blessedly innocent and ignorant. But now everybody has a line, and they're very plausible. But when I see the results I think to myself, Christ Almighty, what was all this highfalutin talk about? Big messages and grand intentions, and none of it there on the screen. If you talk too much you let the magic out. So, I don't feel that I have a divine mission.

Is there anything you regret not having done?

Oh, some subjects on which I put in a lot of work and which never got to the screen: *The Right Honourable Gentleman*, about the Dilke case; *Nine Tiger Man*; *Bloomer Girl*; *The Spiritualists*, about William Crookes and Eliza Cooke. But nothing is ever wasted: all the reading and research about early feminism for *Bloomer Girl* and about Victorian spiritualism for *The Spiritualists* comes in useful for *Vicky*. Of course there are some things I can do now, at my advanced age; other things would bore me.

Tell me about Vicky.

It's the story of Victoria Woodhull, who is at present in fashion, I suppose, because of women's lib. And it is true that she was the first woman to run for President of the United States, and the first woman to deal

on Wall Street, and an early proponent of free love and sexual equality for women. But she was also a fascinating person, very complex and magnetic, very sexy. She must have been an impossible woman, and a total charmer. The trouble with her life is that it lacks climax: she would have been famous earlier if she had been beheaded or burnt at the stake. But instead she lived on to a respectable and prosperous old age, cheerfully denying most of what she had said earlier on. And she did a bit of everything—mediumship, politics, journalism, oratory, finance, theatre (oh yes, I know, the theatre always comes up in my films somewhere). But Costigan has done a very good job on the script, treating it kaleidoscopically starting with her extreme old age, when she's a bit dotty and forgetful. All we need now is to shorten it a bit and we're ready to go.

Do you ever fear the competition of your own past?

That shows you're still a journalist! What you really mean is, am I frightened of people saying 'Poor old thing, he's not up to it any more!' No, I don't think so. For one thing I don't look back, I don't care to. And I don't think all those famous masterpieces of my past are all that hot anyway. When we saw some of them together it was a painful and rather shaming experience. If they are the competition I should fear I'm not impressed; I hope and believe I could do better now. At least I'll be making new mistakes, now that I've made all the old ones.

Are there practical problems about continuing in Hollywood much after the age of 60—insurance, for instance?

None that cannot be overcome if producers really want you to go on working. I still have more offers of films to direct than I could ever want to take up, so I'm already forced to consider the possibility of the film after the film after next. And I still have my health and most of my faculties. I'm not blind or deaf, and if I'm not quite as agile as I was, I never was very: you won't find many action-packed epics among my works, and I doubt if I'm likely to start now.

To survive in the film business it would seem you have to be tough. Are you tough?

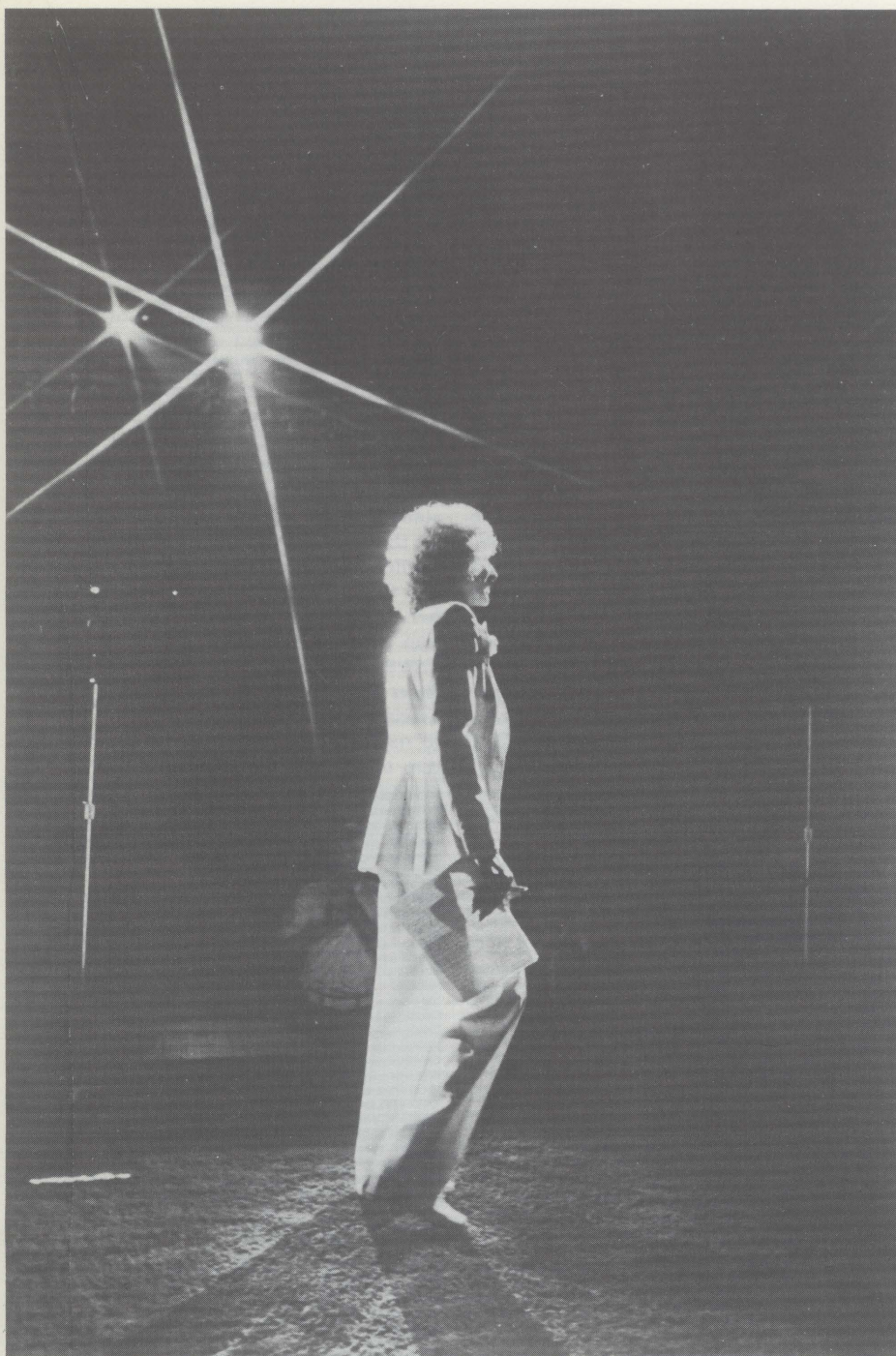
Tough? I don't know. I'm very persistent. But I think the main thing is to keep up the quality of your work, so that people know they can rely on you. And not dwell on hard luck stories or bear grudges—it's unproductive. You have to be patient and resilient. Maybe that is being tough?

Could you ever retire?

No. I'll die with my boots on! Why should I retire? Retire to what? Anyway, don't I have what they call retirement living at its finest right here? To retire is to die a little. It would be awful to get up and have nothing to do all day.

So, after Vicky, what?

I don't know. Hungarofilm want me to make a film for them, being the distinguished Hungarian-American that I am. I don't know anything about modern Hungary, but possibly a Molnar subject—I've even discussed *The Guardsman* with Maggie Smith. And there are other offers. I'll know better where I stand when I know how long *Vicky* will take me. There's always another movie . . .



THE WOMAN IN THE MOON

Garrett Stewart

These remarks have a way of descending on Streisand's new film as a quintessential test case, for in *A Star Is Born* she is for the first time playing a singer, not a stage comedienne like Fanny Brice with song in her repertoire, and is personally responsible, as the end titles inform us, for the 'musical concepts'. She has for once isolated her voice itself as a star property, almost a palpable presence on the screen. The mammoth close-ups and meticulous framings of the musical numbers seem to be trying to visualise for us the hyperbolic intimacy of Streisand's voice, the almost geometric mastery of her phrasing and dynamics. The songs are also recorded live, as in no other movie musical of recent decades, unmediated by that fidgety distance of sound synchronisation to which we had almost grown inured in movie musicals.

Which brings us to a word about the songs as sung. The premise of the film, Barbra Streisand as a rock star, was from the first hint of production three years ago an invitation to venom—continued now that the film has opened from, laughably, both sides of the fence. Critics who fancy themselves aficionados of rock have bitterly criticised her for refusing to budge from her tested strengths as a singer ('This simply isn't rock music'), while the enemies of rock culture hear her degrading her gifts ('wrecking her image, talent, and femininity' by 'trying to sound like those screaming banshees of ten years ago'). All we need to believe to make the movie credible is that, singing as she does in it, she would captivate today's new musical public. And the fact is that Streisand did spellbind even the anxious, hostile, hard-rock audience before which the location filming for *A Star Is Born* was done.

In this movie she has worked closely with her songwriters to achieve a blend of raw energy and vocal finesse which are only her traditional strengths in a more hard-driving concentration. Barbra Streisand began to make her stamp on cabaret singing in the limbo years just before the Beatles

The case for or against Barbra Streisand should always be a double one, for the actress without song is never more than half the talent, half the screen presence. Her best straight dramatic films would try to deny this, while her best musicals build such divisions into their very structure, both in the analysis of character and, curiously enough, in the acknowledgment of story as star vehicle. The case should rest with both musical and dramatic gifts, but the relevant testimony has rarely been forthcoming.

Glenn Gould has given us the only extended, expert impression we have of the Streisand voice, a voice he ranks alongside Elisabeth Schwarzkopf's as 'one of the natural wonders of the age, an instrument of infinite diversity and timbral resonance,' with 'the fastest vibrato in the west and the most impeccable intonation this side of Maria Stader's prime.' But Streisand, who began as a singer, has become an actress who seems always in danger of permanently lowering her screen voice into mere dialogue. Pauline Kael wrote a few years back: 'Streisand could inaugurate a new kind of musical, because she uses song as Astaire used dance, expressively, to complete a role and make it a myth. I can't think of a single greater waste of screen talent than there would be if, because of the new economic calculations about musicals, this actress-singer decided to turn to straight acting roles. She would be abandoning her true singularity—her ability to extend a character in song.'

before their transformation of popular music, before Grace Slick or Aretha Franklin or Laura Nyro, all of whom have influenced her recent albums. To play a star emerging over a decade later than she did herself, she has not conformed to an untenable style, as some would have it, but has reimagined her talent the way it would be deployed if she were new to the musical public today. Esther's material is not only authentically current, by some of the most important writers now working in the field (Paul Williams, Leon Russell, *et al.*), but it speaks for Streisand's personality as never before.

This is scarcely guaranteed to please everyone. It must be said that Streisand's parthenogenesis as a cult figure a decade and a half before the birth of Esther Hoffman in *A Star Is Born* ensured—largely, one guesses, because of the peculiarly aggressive grain of her emerging talent—the kind of ardent disfavour into which she almost instantly fell with the hordes of anti-fans. Garbo too had her detractors, Garland her legions of them. It is the price this kind of female star pays for her oddity, her excess, and her autocratic insistence on both. The Streisand critics, however, have never been so virulent as in their reaction to *A Star Is Born*, where her stardom is not only flamboyantly at stake, once more, but thematically at issue. There have been other movies simultaneously by and about stars, of course, most obviously Garland's 1954 *A Star Is Born*, directed by George Cukor, as well as two earlier versions of the same story, William Wellman's in 1937 and Cukor's 1932 *What Price Hollywood?*—other movies directly about the surrender of self to its own celebrity, the erosions of privacy, the deprivations of fame. Sadly, there is always something held back about them, a debilitating reticence just where they might cut loose and cut deep, laying bare the fortified and beleaguered ego that performing must erect. Streisand's film is no different in kind, only in the kinetic tension it generates by the special prominence of her vocal artistry as a function of the rift between self and fame, artist and public phenomenon.

Though half of Streisand's ten films in almost as many years have been musicals, *A Star Is Born* is her first considered departure from the expectations of the genre. She has repeatedly used song to escape from the creaking mediocrities of the script into some kind of self-definition, however aggrandising, as in 'I'm the Greatest Star' from her 1968 screen debut in *Funny Girl*. Yet the singing until now seemed never quite as important as the self-assertion; musical numbers were soliloquies that happened to be sung. In *A Star Is Born* they are, suddenly, arias. The most successful movie musical in recent years, *Cabaret*, where all the numbers grew organically from the theatrical locale, used song and dance in ironic juxtaposition to the lives that surrounded and peopled the stage. In *A Star Is Born*, however, music wants to become the primary dramatic material. It neither orchestrates nor punctuates the key scenes, but rather composes them, or tries valiantly to, with the expressive density of a contemporary pop opera, where the love scenes and even the death scene are in

music, not merely accompanied or counterpointed by it. This movie does not merely come alive when Streisand sings; it is about coming alive in song, about lives lived, linked and ended in a lyric.

When the movie is merely talking, however, the trouble with its formula narrative of male star on the skids and female star in the ascendant is that it becomes far more his story than hers. Even in the case of Streisand's Esther and Kris Kristofferson's John Norman Howard there is no way to redress the emotional imbalance, and Streisand is left the often thankless dramatic task of playing tragic foil to the doomed hero. Inhabiting his role with a worn but magnetic distraction, Kristofferson stays consistently gripping as the rock star on the way out and down, while her young singer is much too gently on the make. The pitfall in the woman's role, so conceived, is that it is one long soft spot in the script, anguished without being troubled, a study in suffering without neurosis. Precisely where we might have expected Streisand of all actresses to fuel this with the driving ego and obsessive competitiveness that instinct tells us, and publicity confirms, explain and complicate her stardom, her confessional energy goes inexplicably slack. So this film of such thinly veiled, widely vaunted autobiography runs aground in her half of the script upon too much gooey coy banter and matriarchal tenderness.

Partly the fault lies with the dialogue credited to John Gregory Dunne, Joan Didion and Frank Pierson, the film's director, which is never as funny, for one thing, as a Streisand performance needs for lift off. Discounting his and his wife Joan Didion's contribution to the final product, Dunne has said that 'the beads are ours, but not the necklace.' Pearls they aren't, with too many flippant and cuddly exchanges like 'I told you not to call me cute'/'You're cute, you're cute, you're cute.' Gone for the most part from Esther's spoken lines is the self-mocking, self-distancing humour that gives the characteristic depth and doubleness to a Streisand heroine, only to surface here in Esther's lyrics. Yet the weakness of the dramatic stretches in *A Star Is Born* is also some failure of nerve or massive miscal-

culation on Streisand's part as executive producer, overseer, and director by proxy. Her assiduous (some would say greedy) share of responsibility for the filming, at every stage from photographic set-ups to final edit, is variously described (depending on how the rumours are running) as anything from apprentice curiosity to an egomaniacal stranglehold on the production.

Certainly she has gone some distance toward enrolling herself as the latest candidate in the small star-as-auteur category of American cinema, with Jerry Lewis perhaps the last unqualified example and Orson Welles in *Citizen Kane* the most instructive precedent. *Kane* is great where *A Star Is Born* at its best merely engrosses, partly because the charismatic might and bravado that galvanised the earlier production of that megalomaniac's film biography were installed at the centre of its thematic interest in the person and performance of Orson Welles. Streisand would not, or her scenarists for some reason could not, unharness her ego or her will so candidly. The exception in *A Star Is Born* can only be felt to prove the rule. When Esther wields the sheer power over her manager that we know Streisand must have commanded in order to make the film in the first place, urging him to listen to John Norman's new songs



'The fortified and beleaguered ego . . .' Streisand in *'A Star Is Born'*; below, Garland in the 1954 version





'Hello Dolly': Walter Matthau and Barbra Streisand in the number 'So Long Dearie'

and withering him with the icy precision of a single line, it is her finest scene outside of a lyric in the film, and a hint of what might have been.

While too much of the script is flimsy and limp, *A Star Is Born* can for the most part be counted upon to go taut in its musical numbers. They graph their own subplot and emotional trajectory, first divided up between two stage numbers each by Kristofferson and Streisand in that order, then converging in two private love duets ('Lost Inside of You', his words to her piano, and 'Evergreen') and from that point leaving her alone on stage. Her first number as an aspiring singer in an out of the way club is an aggressive, sometimes clever history of strong women from Nefertiti and Cleopatra through Elizabeth I, a song called 'Queen Bee'. It is followed in the same set, while John Norman is all the while drunkenly interrupting, by another feminist number called 'Everything' about a woman who wants not much, but more, including the White House. Streisand and her songwriters have obviously worked hard to make her film a theatre of war in what she recently called 'the unconscious psychological battle between men and women.' This is true even of those faltering, half thought out moments of intimacy between the lovers, as when, in a bizarre bathtub scene, Streisand is seen mysteriously applying glittery make-up to Kristofferson's face. Feminism is even more overt, though far less discussed, in *A Star Is Born* than in her hedging, ambivalent *Up the Sandbox* (1972), and it seems a natural progression from the strong roles to which Streisand has always gravitated, often with an edge of androgyny.

There has always been a strain of tough-willed independence in Streisand's recorded material, ever since her ironic, accusatory 'Cry Me a River' or the fiery defiance of 'Never Will I Marry'. Until her new film, the screen number that best caught the gaiety of her aggressive side, in an otherwise witlessly overdressed movie, was when she

flung her feather boa around Walter Matthau's neck in *Hello Dolly* (1969), grabbed his top hat and cane, and in parodic drag spat out the blistering 'So Long Dearie'. Male and female are not the only psychic alternatives that can cohabit within a Streisand role, though the androgyny, as with her men's suits in *Funny Lady* and *A Star Is Born* (after Garland's in the 1954 version), serves to exaggerate into clarity that doubleness which lies at the heart of her versatility and her appeal. From the first, even on records, her genius has shown itself in a skittish, schizoid mix of tough and tender, abrasive and softly yielding, a manic vacillation between hauteur and kittenish need, between solipsism and dependence. Streisand pushes to the point of relentless self-irony that emotional tension which characterises the two great American actresses she most resembles, Katharine Hepburn and Greta Garbo. Hepburn's alternating current between shyness and self-assertion made her transvestite performance in *Sylvia Scarlett* almost a paradigm of her screen personality; and for Garbo, whose aura of cultivated glamour Streisand deliberately approximates, duality became an habitual strategy in her film roles.

Streisand's freshest screen acting to date remains her reformed prostitute in *The Owl and the Pussycat* (1970), perhaps because the archetypal paradox of the 'whore with a heart of gold' released most compellingly the tensions in her screen presence between domineering confidence and vulnerable naiveté. It is just this kind of role to which Garbo was drawn again and again, most notably in *Anna Christie*, *Susan Lennox*, *Her Fall and Rise* and *Camille*. The divided mentality of the Garbo heroine could take even more curious forms. After an uneasy flirtation with *doppelgänger* psychology in Pirandello's *As You Desire Me* (1932), she next took the lead in the feminist tragedy *Queen Christina* (1933), not only playing the resolutely unwed queen of Sweden but at one point impersonating a young nobleman. In *Ninotchka* she divided her screen

time between the severe Russian agent and the romantic heroine into which love transformed her, a virtual dual role, and in her next and last movie, *Two-Faced Woman*, she played a strait-laced woman masquerading as her own uninhibited sister, a self-devised alter ego. Such an explicit role-within-a-role, the self as its own imposture, a manipulation of masks, typifies not only Garbo, with her list of sexually riven or otherwise duplicit characterisations, but that whole tradition of female screen acting which Streisand so instinctively continues past the heyday of the star system.* Acting becomes a metaphor for the division and projections of a self, the embodiment of alternative urges, with Streisand's heroines repeatedly standing back from their own impulses, looking out for themselves by warily looking on.

If for no other reason, Streisand's part in *On a Clear Day You Can See Forever* (1970) was an ideal role for her, allowing the actress to play two versions of the same self centuries apart in time, and further, as the contemporary half of this reincarnated duo, to sing a duet, through trick photography, with her stronger present self, her psychic guardian angel. More recently we see something of this divided nature in the less byzantine structure of *The Way We Were* (1973), where 'style' is examined not only as an ingredient of screen acting but as an implement of the self in its efforts at definition, sometimes an impediment. The kinky-haired Jewish radical heroine decides that she doesn't have 'the right style' for her lover, so she impersonates, in Hollywood no less, the smoothly coiffured romantic fixture with which he wishes to furnish his life. It is yet another dual role for Streisand, of a sort, but the inauthentic half of her self must finally be discarded. By the end of the movie she must give up her man to get herself back, curls and all, regaining her identity in a consolidating gesture: integrity as integration.

In Streisand's roles as a stage star, in *Funny Girl*, *Funny Lady* and now *A Star Is Born*, the emotional division is likely to cause stress at the boundary between the performing and the private self, between actress or singer and woman, and even on stage between male and female stereotypes. The idiosyncratic singer-actress who for years said she wanted, like Bernhardt, to play Hamlet, now sings in the 'Everything' number about wanting to play Othello, and in fact about that urge for a second self—'I'd like to have the perfect twin, one who'd go out as I came in'—to extend and enlarge her identity. Usually one of Streisand's selves looks askance at the other from a defensive vantage, with sarcasm asked to bridge the chasm between everyday identity and the fantasised self.

The first time the world saw Streisand's face on camera she was staring at it too, in the famous opening of *Funny Girl* when she looks into a mirror and says with lowbrow archness, 'Hello gorgeous'. The closing shot

* In *The World in a Frame: What We See in Films*, Leo Braudy persuasively argues that 'the double' is 'the most prevalent way of defining human nature' on film, though in a long discussion he draws an example from, among important American actresses, only Bette Davis' 1946 twinned role in *A Stolen Life*.

of its sequel, *Funny Lady* (1975), also has Fanny Brice looking into the mirror at the romantic failure of her personal self, only to have the image superimposed upon by a montage of her professional triumphs. Both these earlier films are about the failed effort to reject stage life for personal life. From the central 'Woman in the Moon' number in *A Star Is Born*, on the other hand, the life of a performing artist emerges not simply as an alternative to private life, but as a metaphor for it in a world 'overrun with rules', where the oppressive injunction is always to 'memorise your lines and move as directed.' The idiom 'changing that tune' grows to an encompassing metaphor as Esther urges her audience to begin 'learning new rhythms from the woman in the moon.' In the world at large 'change' may be a 'word for wrong', she laments, but—and her voice soars enormously as if to make space for the metaphor of amplitude and freedom—'NOT IN MY SONG.' That song, that sense of herself residing in the wider possibilities opened up by music, is for much of the film Esther's greatest strength, and by the end all she has. *Funny Girl* saw this coming.

After the precarious blend of irony and congratulation in the 'Hello gorgeous' opener, Fanny takes her place third row centre in a deserted theatre, herself as sole audience. From the best seat in the house she stares past the proscenium at an empty stage as if it were an allegory of the unpropitiously barrenness of her life, as it turns out to be when the movie immediately dissolves into a two-hour biographical flashback. When we are returned to the present, and her husband to her, only for a last goodbye, she wanders numbly on to this same stage for her big number, to the riotous reception of the theatre audience, yet at the end of this Brice signature song, 'My Man', there is not a sound from the house. In this last assertion of her need, Streisand as Brice moved through a purgative rite of confessional self-projection that anticipates the end of *A Star Is Born*, a public moment so private that applause would be a violation. At the end of her therapeutic ordeal in both films, singing in and of the isolation and solipsistic grandeur of stardom itself, she is lost in that art which alone, and only alone, can repair her desolation. The cheers from the movie audiences that in early showings of both films greeted her last number, though there is no ovation on the soundtrack from the concert audience, merely highlight the distance between the removed artist, present in this case only through the one-way medium of film, and the spectators reached by her talent. Unlike *Funny Girl*, however, *A Star Is Born* annexes an extra dimension to the last solo which seems intended to make it almost a transcendental duet, to round out the theme of communion through music which has given the love story, at least in conception, its power and originality.

Many lines in the new film are borrowed from previous versions, yet one in particular by Esther Blodgett in the Garland remake that does not appear in Streisand's is richly implicit in everything about her relationship with Kristofferson. 'I somehow feel most alive when I'm singing,' says Garland in her first conversation with Norman Maine (James Mason), and that momentary effusion seems more like the fostering idea of the

latest version, which might have had Esther Hoffman saying to John Norman Howard: 'Somehow I feel most in love when we're singing.' It is in the effort to bring this notion up from latency into a series of elating moments that the movie takes its real imaginative risks.

One seems to backfire with audiences, another detonates too early. We cut from the scene of first love-making to the lovers' voices in a room in which the panning camera has not yet found them, as John Norman says, 'Let's do it again.' Esther groans, 'I'm too tired,' and many in the audience titter so loudly that they seem to miss the intended joke that the lovers are talking not about sex but, as we see when the camera shortly catches up to them, about practising one of Esther's songs on the guitar. The joke is meant to jostle our expectations into line with theme, for in this movie music is an act of love. The foreplay that sent them to bed in the first place was performed at the keyboard, Esther playing a gentle, lilting melody she had composed and John Norman extemporising lyrics about the paradox of self-oblivion in love, a reciprocity that will bring meaning to his own death later: 'You came inside my life/Now I'm lost/Inside of you/Lost in the music/And lost in your eyes.' Esther moves her hands across the keys until his lyrics move her to passion, and as she reaches for him the same piano melody, unaccompanied by the lush strains of standard romantic scoring, is continued even though her own fingers are at his face. This is the non-comic idea that always backfires with some of the audience, who snicker at the supposedly ludicrous liberty—as if we were not intended to realise that she is no longer playing. The scene is too blatantly illogical for accident, and is clearly meant to suggest what is later borne out: that music between these lovers is touch.

And can touch us. Their harmony is enacted here in this shared moment of composition and emotional composure, as it is again in their duet in the recording studio, to the other ballad for which Streisand wrote the music, 'Evergreen'. This second and last moment of musical union is a psychic island flanked by the pressures of the public lives each of them must lead, and the number is edited into and out of with devastating accuracy. Pieces of this film, as well as their piecing together, are cinematically articulate in a way difficult to detect in any of Streisand's

'*Funny Girl*': 'from the best seat in the house she stares at an empty stage ...'



earlier nine movies, none of which could be said to have had a consistent visual style. Yet for once director, cinematographer and editor (Streisand herself being responsible for the final cut) have combined to give the film a clean momentum and pervasive hard-edged sheen, a kind of rarefied naturalism that at its spare best can elegantly argue a mood.

Especially in the electrified abstract opening and in the concert sequences throughout, Robert Surtees has captured, through his craftily matched and muted colour cinematography, the weight and press of the volatile rock audience, as well as that thin line between exhilaration and panic on and back stage. The non-musical soundtrack is recorded with an Altman-influenced density of sound, at times muffled and heavy-handed, that tries at the expense of some crucial dialogue to complement the heightened photographic realism. The lighting is more successful, because its effort is to accentuate rather than to homogenise. On stage, spotting and backlighting and colour changes suggest a variety of synesthesia in which the look of a song takes fire from its own dynamic charge. At its most meticulous, too, the movie is edited, within and between scenes, to catch the disorienting surge and psychic voltage of the concert world, its race and disarray. As we were about to see in the central section surrounding the 'Evergreen' duet, scene can also follow scene, and unfold from the inside, with the implacable pace of a fate.

Esther has just told John Norman's manager, 'I am good for him, you know,' alluding to his new sobriety and high spirits, and the manager has replied, 'But he ain't working, Esther. This is rock-n-roll, you know.' The ominous note thus sounded, the love duet becomes its momentary but shadowed reprieve, followed immediately by a jump cut to the rock benefit where John Norman interrupts his own moribund act to bring Esther, unprepared and unwarned, into the limelight. Pressed in upon from both sides by the onus of their public lives, the 'Evergreen' number has a special impact, and it may be the most mercurial and ecstatic love scene on film since Garbo's fabled neck went back to the caresses of Robert Taylor in *Camille*, and one of the most unabashedly sensual. The lovers gaze mesmerised at each other as she carries the melody and he joins her tentatively along the way. Kristofferson is to date Streisand's most exciting leading man, and some of the best dramatic scenes are in fact his. He not only brings his rough-hewn hypnotic charm to the duet, but he gives himself over to it with real emotional abandon. Few male stars have allowed themselves to be so grandly giddy on camera.

Glenn Gould has noted a Puccini-like bravura in Streisand's early standard, 'He Touched Me', but here, as never before in her musicals, she makes true operatic contact with her partner, however vocally hesitant his half of the duet. Streisand has sung with men before on screen, but this is the first time she has been joined to one in song, by song. It is the least static of all her big romantic numbers, and it shows what singing on film can be. As the camera wheels languorously back and forth in a semi-circular arc around the recording booth, we at times see only his face, not

hers, the recipient at the height of his wonder and gratitude; we see, that is, her gift visualised as a grace bestowed. As recording artists Hoffman and Howard this is their one mutual moment in the film, the one instance of professional parity, and the seamless flowing camerawork confirms this harmony.

We at once jump to the public arena in which shots of John Norman in the wings are intercut with those of Esther on stage, a disjunction he, at least, knew had to come. Not only this intercutting, but camera placement and movement italicise the metamorphosis of the star in this sequence. Her first big song, 'The Woman in the Moon', is edited in close-up with a compelling inner logic of its own, but when Esther returns to the stage for her second number she is suddenly dwarfed amid the cheering crowd by a lightning-fast reverse zoom that plummets the driving intimacies of the first solo into the theatrical cavern of the performing self, at once the personal triumph and the personal diminishment of stardom. Yet the second song she sings now, as if to complement the feminist manifesto of 'The Woman in the Moon', is the jubilant 'I Believe in Love'. And in the next scene—Streisand tells in interviews how she fought for the shape of this sequence—she proposes marriage to her man wearing the man's suit in which she has just won the heart of the crowd.

The marriage comes off, with a feminist dismissal of 'the honour and obey part', but it doesn't work out, and neither does much of the dialogue from here on. But what the songs showed us Esther and John Norman had together is more than enough to make us feel its tragic slippage and the grief of its loss, and to make us understand that loss, and its transcendence, in terms of music. Esther wants desperately for them to go on tour together, yet everyone but Esther knows that John's public participation in her career can only endanger it. When he interrupts a photographic session to tell Esther that he can't do the tour, her look of perplexity and hurt is captured with congratulations by the photographer, life fed upon and converted into a publicity still. It is one of many enlarged photos of her that surround her husband at the recording studio in the very next scene—again the film's treacherously apt editing—as he hears that his band has gone on to new success without him. The partnership is over, indeed every collaboration for the faded star, and the marital duet is doomed. John Norman Howard has nowhere else to turn professionally, and the next and last time we see him trying to make any contact with his talent is the bleakly moving scene where his efforts to write a quiet love song, 'With One More Look At You' (based on the exit lines of the two previous Norman Maines in earlier versions of *A Star Is Born*), are interrupted by telephone calls for his famous wife.

Too soon he will be taking, silently, that one more look and driving to his death in a red Ferrari that has been carefully set up as a personification of Esther. When first sitting in his black Cadillac limousine, she joked that it was the kind of car people get buried in, asking him in a later scene, 'Where's the hearse?' Instead he shows



'A Star Is Born': Streisand and Kristofferson; the memorial concert

her his Ferrari, licence plate 'WANTED', which he says 'reminds me of you . . . fast, but not my lady.' It becomes a death car, if not quite a hearse, and as he pushes the speedometer to 160 m.p.h., going (in the words of his greatest hit) 'faster and farther than I've ever gone,' he is listening on a cassette tape to her voice. Looking back repeatedly in the rear-view mirror on a love he cannot help but flee for its own good, he first plugs in a tape of his hit song, 'Watch Closely Now', and just after the ironic lines 'Are you a figment of my imagination/Or am I one of yours?' he switches to a tape marked 'Esther' and becomes a figment of her own vocal imagination and mastery, 'lost in the music', as the song sings, and driving over the fatal hill into invisibility as the last lingering strains of 'now I'm lost inside of you' die out with deadly timing. He gave her those words, and she in her greater artistry gives them back to him in a displaced *Liebestod*, her last lyric attenuated sweetly into his oblivion.

In the Garland version, Norman Maine was delighted to have 'the original belter' in the flesh, and on his honeymoon turned off her hit song on the motel radio to have her sing it in person. As he walked to his death in the ocean after taking the obligatory last look, Garland was singing quietly in the kitchen. The idea of the hero's suicide softened by the voice of the heroine is therefore not new, but its reciprocity is, for Streisand's Esther is allowed to work through her loss in song. After her husband's death she is shaken from her silent grief by hearing the tape he made while trying out the lyrics of 'With One More Look At You', turned on accidentally by a workman in their mansion, and she thinks for a touching few moments, if rather too many, that he

may somehow be alive. Which of course he is, in his song to her. She listens to the tape in tears and baffled rage, arguing back at his recorded voice, calling him a 'liar' for the cheating optimism of the lyrics. Yet she goes on, in the next and climactic scene, to debut this song for him, and to blend it in medley with his hit song 'Watch Closely Now'. She dresses for this memorial concert not in black but in white, and again in a man's suit, her performance being both in her husband's honour and in his stead, begun standing stock still and ended in a Jagger-like wild fury, purging her rage.

The star must be reborn if she is to 'go on' in either sense, and this she manages by reincarnating her lover in his own music. It is her half, in person now, of the *Liebestod*, with an elegiac urgency meant to transfigure the love-death into hope for continuance, however impersonal. 'Star' itself becomes a resurrected metaphor, not a dead one, when she promises, 'I'll have the constellations paint your portrait too.' It is without doubt a spectacular performance of the self as performing spectacle, the stronger half of Streisand's recurrently divided screen nature.

It is unfortunately the other half of that self, whose offstage psychology the dialogue should have intrigued us with, which has been so wispily realised that it cannot bear the weight of that awesome but flawed last scene, the most immediate sadness of which is that nothing Streisand can muster will quite activate its tragedy. To take the full measure of the scene, however, must be to estimate intention rather than impact, to sense a structural motive behind the claustrophobic extravaganza. The all but hysterical ego-projection of this last number is not just Streisand as star giving herself over to us as she has always wished to do, but an act of self-preservation and sanity on the part of the star she is playing. The camera holds her tear-stained face in locked caress, struck immobile for the seven unalleviated minutes of these two dovetailed songs, as Esther delivers herself from quiet anguish into an orgiastic invocation beyond the grave. The problem is not that this scene plays for a misjudged two or three minutes too long, or that the camera keeps needlessly glued to Streisand's favoured left side, too fixated perhaps to be transfixing. The problem is that for Esther it is the apotheosis of a character who has not earned it, and who cannot repay our attention to it.

The deepest flaws of the movie run right down its middle to this last scene like a geological fault, a cleft dividing character from singer, dialogue from song. The screenwriters' idea of the hero's laconic cynicism serves Kristofferson well, but the script gives Streisand as Esther too little to say for herself, too lightly. We know the dignity she is giving back to her husband in his absence, but not what fears of her own her song sublimates, what demons of remorse or self-doubt it must arrest and wrestle down, what strengths other than vocal it draws upon. Streisand knew better than this. She knew by instinct what was missing from the other versions of *A Star Is Born*, both in their statements about female suffering and in their emotional architecture. She knew that her film should end in an act of art, not just of fortitude, in

Third World Film- maker



Filming in the villages: 'Rekava' (1956)

An Interview with Lester James Peries

A. J. Gunawardana

While Bombay and Madras are together assuming the functions of a 'Third World' Hollywood, some Asian and African countries are slowly, if not altogether modestly, building up domestic film industries, with small studios located in their capital cities. Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon) is one such country, where a rapidly expanding cinema is still unchallenged by television and has the mass entertainment field almost to itself. The first film in Sinhala, the national language, was made thirty years ago; yet the market has traditionally been dominated by imported films, especially those brought in from Bombay and Madras. The creation of the state-owned Film Corporation, which now controls every aspect of the industry from the importation of movies, stock and equipment to the financing of productions, has not radically changed this situation.

The Film Corporation has broken the long established ties with U.S.-owned distribution companies (American-distributed films are no longer imported), but films in the Hindi, Tamil and English languages still take up the bulk of screen time. Interest in the Sinhala cinema, however, has greatly increased over the past few years, as has its audience. The number of new releases a year averages around twenty, and films are made at a production cost of about \$30,000, raw stock being the most expensive single item. Stock is available only under licence from the Film Corporation, a quota being allocated to each new production approved. Unlike the Hindi or Tamil product, the

Sinhala film has no market outside the country, which has a total adult population of less than 10 million. A nation-wide first release can go up to 20 copies, and a film must do at least six weeks of good business to turn a profit. There are no regular production companies; private financiers form the backbone of the industry, capitalising productions on an *ad hoc* basis. And a star system, although not as extensively developed as in India, helps to determine the films' box-office performance.

Lester James Peries is Sri Lanka's foremost film-maker. He began his career in English-language journalism, and it was in England that he first turned his hand to

film directing. He made his first feature in 1956—ten years after the arrival of the Sinhala-language cinema. Since then, Peries has made nine more features and several documentaries; and is currently working on a film derived from a Sinhala novel. Peries has received international recognition (the 1964 New Delhi Grand Prix for *Gamperaliya*; retrospectives at New York's Museum of Modern Art and London's National Film Theatre), but in Sinhala cinema he is still in a minority of one. Commercial directors recognise his talent but tend to view him as an 'un-Sinhala' film-maker, perhaps because of his rejection of mainstream conventions. And he has been charged with 'lack of political commitment'. Peries, in other words, meets the same kind of criticism that Satyajit Ray finds in Bengal. His own commitment, he says, is to a liberal humanism.

One of the things you pioneered in this country—and perhaps even in this part of the world—was making films on location. Are you happy with the way location shooting has developed in Sri Lanka?

LESTER JAMES PERIES: I ought to go into the reasons that led me to make films on location twenty-odd years ago, because it wasn't

something done simply on impulse. My first film work in Sri Lanka was with Ralph Keene, who was then head of the Ceylon Government Film Unit. He belonged to the classic British tradition of documentary, and I was associated with him on three films, working with him in the villages on documentaries about ordinary people. That, I believed, was the impetus behind my wish to make my first feature, *Rekava* (1956), on location. Now I would say that what I was trying to do, perhaps unconsciously, was very clearly to establish what one could call, without being chauvinistic, a national identity. There was an urge to create a distinctive image of the country, as there was at that time in the other arts.

The Sinhala films that preceded mine were shot in South Indian studios, and what you got from them was an image of another country: different patterns of behaviour, even unfamiliar costumes. Trying to project a more authentic image meant that one *had* to go on location and set up the cameras in remote villages, in rice paddies and rivers, to shoot and record our films with rather cumbersome equipment. One instinctively felt that one had to go to the village, because it was there that one could capture the authentic textures of Ceylonese life. Going on location then was a kind of mission. The more convention-bound directors said that it was madness to try to make features this way. But we did succeed in showing that the old concept of a film having to be made in a studio with huge paraphernalia and armies of technicians was not the only practical one. Now of course there is a whole army of film-makers who feel that it is as easy to make a feature as it is to make a documentary—all you have to do is take a lightweight camera and as small a crew as possible, and go out and shoot.

Hasn't the location sequence become a set-piece in the average studio-made commercial film?

Yes, in every Sinhalese film you now have what is called 'going on location'. This is really going out to film the songs. And the songs are invariably staged in gardens, on hillsides or on the seashore—the hero pursuing the heroine against some natural scenery. Whereas the original motive was to reproduce the authentic physical surfaces of life, now you have a location-shooting style which results in the exact opposite. Commercial films are being made on location all the time. But the result—and this is extraordinary—is identical to shots made in a studio. In other words, the commercial directors have found that it is easier to do the fantasy thing on location. It is not the lighting that gives this effect: it's the staging of the scenes, the treatment of the *mise en scène*. You don't need to paint the backdrop any more.

I remember you once said that the South Indian formula was being abandoned in the Sinhala cinema. I question that now. I would think this development simply suggests that Colombo is in tandem with Madras and Bombay.

That's exactly what has happened. Bombay and Madras directors, working predominantly in colour, are realising, twenty-five years after Europe and after Satyajit Ray, that in some ways it is easier to make films on location. The Sinhala

commercial film follows the same style. But the formula has not been broken. In a simple-minded way, we tended to assume that once we leave the confines of the studio set, with its painted backdrops, we rescue the camera from its world of fantasy. But I think the commercial directors are cleverer than we thought. They have succeeded in devaluing the artistic possibilities of location shooting. It has ceased to be a cinematic virtue.

What other differences do you notice in these twenty-one years?

I would say that not very much else has happened, and it's rather disappointing to

Three of Lester James Peries' films: 'Ransalu' ('The Yellow Robes', 1967), 'Gamperaliya' ('The Changing Village', 1963), 'Sandesaya' ('The Message', 1960)



look back, and to realise that the audience is still in the grip of the formula film. Not entirely, but mostly. There is a segment of the audience which does respond to films outside the commercial formula, and such films are being attempted by half a dozen young directors in this country.

I suppose you might say that my *Rekava* was the beginning of the growth of this audience. It told a story that was completely outside the kind of thing people were used to seeing in the Sinhala cinema—it was the story of a little boy and a little girl who *do not* grow up at the end of reel 12 to get married—

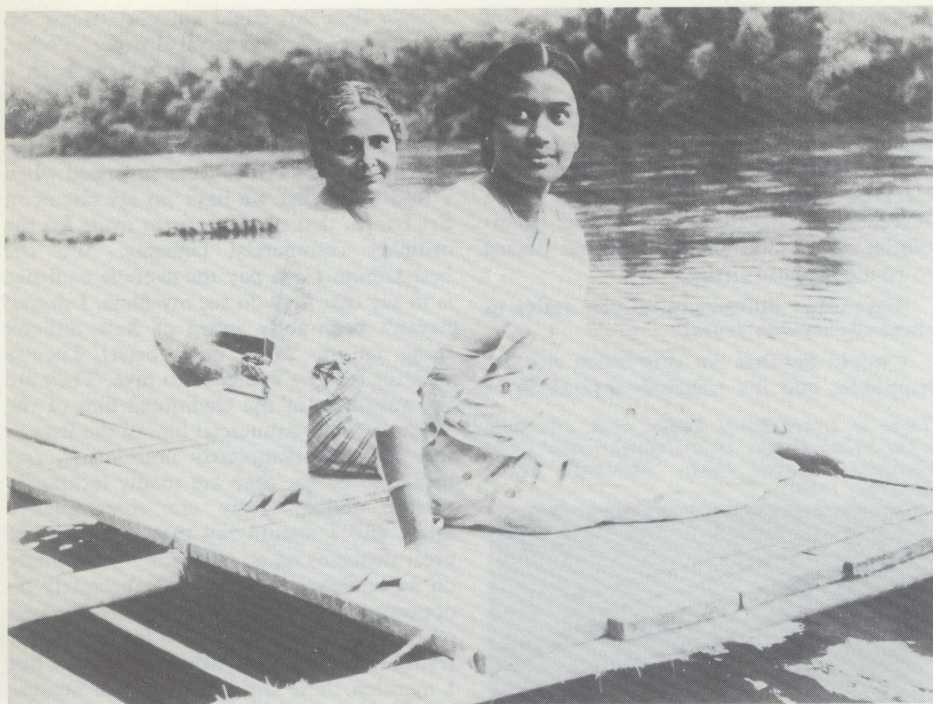
a story they just could not understand. So *Rekava* was a commercial disaster. Today, however, there is an audience for such a film. When the retrospectives of my work were run in New York and London, I was often asked whether I made the films for an art circuit. The critics were surprised when I told them that we have no art circuit in Sri Lanka, that my films were made for the ordinary commercial cinemas. And the best tribute I can pay the average audience is to say that they do see my films. I myself haven't been fully aware of how difficult some of my films have been. They're difficult for any audience to take. They are the antithesis of the traditional film of the West and the commercial film of the East in that they are completely undramatic, and meant to be so; they are totally lacking in surface action. They are contemplative films, and I should say that I have made great demands on an audience—particularly on an audience that has had absolutely no opportunity of seeing films by, say, Bresson or Ozu or Dreyer. I'm not for a moment trying to compare my work with theirs, but I mention these three film-makers because they were quoted by Donald Richie in the course of an article.

Have you in fact been influenced by those film-makers?

I have seen one film by Ozu, the director with whose work Richie constantly compares mine; I haven't seen as many Bressons as I would like; and apart from the two or three very well known Dreyer films, I haven't seen much of his work. [The Colombo Film Society, which did pioneering work in presenting foreign classics, is no longer active because of foreign exchange difficulties.] But I dare say that Richie has a point when he suggests that film-makers like Ray in India, myself in Sri Lanka, Ozu in Japan, and I suppose the remarkable new Iranian film-maker Shahid Saless, are preoccupied with similar things, with a cinema which is involved with recording the interior life of the people of their countries. Perhaps if you do this in an oriental country you end up with a contemplative cinema, just as Bresson ends up with a kind of religious cinema... But I think the general audience does have a potential for responding to this kind of cinema; and as long as the films hold up a mirror to their emotional lives, we can get a response from members of the audience despite forty years of brainwashing by the Indian-style film.

How would you relate your experiences to the Third World cinema as a whole?

I haven't seen enough to comment. But the two or three films I have seen by Ousmane Sembene, certainly the work of some of the young Iranian film-makers, and even the films by the very experimental directors in Bombay who call themselves the 'parallel cinema', show similar pre-occupations. Back in 1970, I suggested that two streams of film-making would develop in the Third World: one was the political action film and the other the contemplative film. This is fairly clear now. Take for instance the new Ethiopian films. They are didactic, political, polemical; they are using newsreel footage, old films, documentaries. They are compilation films rather like the Argentinian film which was the precursor of them all—the famous



'A contemplative cinema . . .': Peries' 'Nidhanaya' ('The Treasure', 1972)

Hour of the Furnaces. But there is also emerging a number of other films concerned with the more contemplative aspects of life.

Are there any unifying characteristics in Third World cinema?

There are common characteristics, and the Third World cinemas are following a fairly predictable course. The new industries which are being set up in countries that had no national industries before are doing more or less what we were doing in 1956—that is, they are trying to establish a national identity. For instance, the Iranian cinema (or sections of it) is establishing a style which is almost documentary in its realism. Or take the films of Sembene—they first portray the physical exterior life of the people of his country—people who have never been so filmed before. Perhaps they may have been filmed by Western documentary film-makers. However sympathetic they may have been, such film-makers were primarily concerned with the exotic.

Does the presence of international film companies hinder or help this growth of national industries?

I think you would find that in practically every country struggling to establish an identity through film, the progress of a national industry has been crippled or adversely affected by foreign companies operating in these countries for many years. When a cinema is saddled with the problem of national identity, you will find that the resulting products are unacceptable to the audience for which they were made. The audience has been brainwashed—practically computerised—into accepting another form of entertainment. I think this is a pattern found in most Third World countries that I know of. In some territories, Western companies are so dominant in terms of exhibition and distribution that local films are condemned as unworthy of screening. I have heard that features made by some African film-makers have never been shown.

How has the situation changed in this country since the State Film Corporation

was established in 1972?

I wish I could say that it has changed very much for the better, but I'm afraid I can't. The State Film Corporation's policy in the first five years is to consolidate itself as a business concern. I don't blame it for that; but I don't know of whom or what it is afraid. I think it wants to be even more successful—spectacularly successful—than the private sector ever was, and in the pursuit of its commercial dream it has placed too much emphasis on activities such as distribution and importation. An enormous amount of work has gone into the founding of the Corporation: enterprise, enthusiasm, energy. But the one area which has been neglected, and where the State Film Corporation could have helped most—and for which indeed the Corporation was originally set up—was in the fostering of a national cinema. Some problems have even worsened. For instance, Hindi films are competing today with Sinhala films in a way that's very damaging to the local product. Because of the dearth of English-language movies [American made or distributed films are no longer imported to Sri Lanka], there is a whole new audience for the Bombay film. Hindi films are running in Colombo cinemas for years at a time, and making great inroads into the potential audience for Sinhala productions.

Would you propose commercial restraints on all imported films?

First of all, the importance of the national cinema has to be clearly established, and the problem hasn't been squarely faced here by the Government or by the Corporation. If one assumes that in any country the national cinema is more than an entertainment—that it's culture, it's politics, it's many things—then you have to adopt certain protective techniques. England adopted a whole body of protective measures against American movies, even if they weren't very successful because the British tried to be fair to everybody. Their scheme was intended to help all films made in England irrespective of quality: that was their mistake. The

French, on the other hand, try to promote both quality and quantity; so do Italy and West Germany . . . There are various ways by which a national industry can be protected—placing higher ticket levies on foreign films, giving theatres rebates for screening national films, and so on. In this country there has been a small cutback in the importation of Indian films and, more by accident than design, the virtual disappearance of the American film. But we haven't formulated a proper film policy as yet, though we are constantly told by the Public Performance Board [the body responsible for censoring films] to make 'good films'.

Perhaps this is the point to ask about censorship. Many film-makers say that dual standards are used by the censors, that they are stricter with the local product than with the imported one.

That's a subject which is regularly aired. And I would point to the absence of consistent standards. The standards seem to change from film to film. What is even more dangerous is that we as film-makers begin to exercise a kind of self-censorship. I think a whole series of things begins to work in a film-maker's mind long before he starts. This automatically cuts out a variety of subjects, because he feels that those subjects would be taboo. We also have a kind of pre-censorship now because all scripts have first to be submitted to the State Film Corporation. Only if the Corporation approves of the script are raw stock and other facilities released. Under the earlier system, the film-maker could take the risk and make the film he wanted, even if it was later banned by the censors. Today, even the initial step is an obstacle—we are perhaps among the most restricted film-makers in the world, with a strict censorship system which operates in a variety of ways, some of them insidious. Perhaps one can take consolation in the fact that money is not being spent on films that may eventually be banned! Although it was established with the best intentions in the world, the State Film Corporation has neither nourished the Sinhala film nor given better cinema to the audience. Enshrined in the Corporation is an old ideal—to make as much money as possible.

Were your problems different in the making of *The God King* (1974), which you directed as a co-production—British and Sri Lankan?

The God King was a very unusual project. It may be unique, in that a British company invested a considerable sum of money, entrusted the key technical responsibilities to Sri Lanka nationals, and selected an Asian story with Asian characters. And it was a film in colour and wide screen meant for the mass audience of the West. One can't speak of *The God King* strictly as a film, divorced from that context. And without flattering ourselves, we have to admit that apart from the fortuitous circumstances that made the project possible, the motives were economic—making an epic film more cheaply than it could have been done in the West.

Weren't there some more positive aspects?

Yes, there were. As you know, Western film-makers have been attracted to former

colonial territories not only by the exotic locations, but also by low production costs and the availability of minor players, extras and technicians at unbelievably low fees. In most of these enterprises, senior technicians in our region were nothing more than manual labourers—distinguished Asian actors were happy playing servants and coolies. The gun and the cross were replaced by a more subtle instrument of exploitation: the movie camera. Even the stories that were being filmed, if one cares to analyse them, were set in the heyday of the British Raj; for the producers and scriptwriters nothing really had changed, the sun had not really set over the Empire. (It wasn't surprising that *Nine Hours to Rama* was sympathetic to the assassin who shot Gandhi, or that *Outcast of the Islands*, which portrayed the degradation of a white man in the East, was a commercial disaster.) There was never any serious attempt at a story of post-Independence Asia. As for the technical aspects of film-making, the assumption was that the cinema is a white man's business.

Considered from this point of view, one must admit that *The God King* was a radical departure... and I am afraid that is as far as one can go. My own experiences as director were so traumatic, bizarre and memorable simultaneously that only a book would do them justice. The first thing one discovers is that the concessions one has to make, the compromises inevitable in international productions, tend to rob the final film of any real identity, so that it ends up belonging to neither the West nor the East. Working on *The God King*, I had the feeling that the system favoured the producer—in this case the financiers, who had virtual control over the script, the casting and the final editing. With three creative areas lost to him, the director begins to realise that basically this is a producer's cinema. Working with a producer as cultured and tactful as Dimitri de Grunwald, and on a story that was a part of our country's history, it was still a constant battle to impose any personal style on the material. To most of our British collaborators, film-making was an industrial process—you manufactured a product to be marketed to a mass audience. I worked on the assumption that they knew their market, only to discover that they knew rather less than I thought.

But despite all the nightmare problems created by the meeting of two nationalities trained in two different disciplines of film-making, *The God King* was eventually completed and even distributed. One consoling factor was that the few critics who were permitted to see the film were sympathetic and magnanimous to the Sri Lanka effort. I doubt if *The God King* experiment will ever be repeated.

What about film criticism in this country? There is much less film criticism today, even in newspapers, than when you began.

When I started out in 1956, there were at least a few critics who did write perceptively and were aware of the problems serious film-makers were facing. They fought to promote a good national cinema. Sadly, those days are gone. It was, however, in the English-language newspapers that one had the most valuable and perceptive critics. In

the Sinhala-language press the critics were not so well informed, and I can tell you why. Ten years ago, I remember speaking to the three most influential critics writing in Sinhala, and I discovered that they had seen very little. They had not seen the great masters (who after all are Western, whether we like it or not); they had not seen the Asian masters either. What they had seen were Hindi films; to them the ideal was *Mother India* of Mehboob Khan, and I dare say that in their experience *Mother India* was the best film they had seen.

Do you think there is some kind of narrow nationalism—an attitude of mind which says that foreign films are alien to the culture, and that there is no need any longer for us to learn from them?

Perhaps. But there are fewer opportunities now for seeing the seminal films. These are no longer imported, and there is no way of training the young. And we need to educate film people, in the way it is being done, say, at the Poona Institute in India. The Poona Institute has produced a whole school of film-makers—young film-makers who may not have changed the course of Indian cinema (nothing ever can, I think), but who have made an impact in their own way through what they call the parallel cinema. Many of the graduates from the Institute have made their peace with the commercial cinema, and in the area of acting they have taken the commercial cinema by storm. But when I talk about a film institute, I go beyond the need of supplying the industry with various talents. Without a basis in film education, it would be very difficult to make what you would call the very nationalist film. In other words, we can't operate as though the cinema had not existed for eighty years. In every country where a national cinema has been established, this has been done by people who have been exposed to the international film culture I'm talking about.

Do you think that in a cinematic culture of greater sophistication than Sri Lanka's you would have been able to achieve more?

I might have made more films: in my 21 years in films, I didn't get work for ten. My ten lost years! And I might have made a different kind of film—perhaps less inhibited in certain areas. But I don't know whether I would have achieved any more. Starting from scratch in my own country gave me the necessary impetus to work; elsewhere, it wouldn't have been half so satisfying. ■

Adventure in co-production: 'The God King'



The Woman in the Moon

from page 181

a gesture that turns strength itself into art, art into strength. Yet she knew how to lay a foundation for this only in the music, not the dialogue, and the last of the songs, with all her talent going for it, needs to have more going into it.

Taken as an abstract emotional pattern, the musical segments of the picture gather to a satisfying shape, from interrupted solos through duets to a recorded song at the moment of suicidal escape, then another taped song mistaken for a resurrection, and on to the final solo, the star lost in solitude, reaching out. In an earlier scene, rehearsing for a television special reminiscent of Streisand's own Emmy-winning experiments in the middle 60s, she is put through the silly footwork of a production number that is so over-choreographed as to prevent her from singing 'The Woman in the Moon' with its proper deliberation and emphasis. 'Memorise your lines and move as directed,' she is in effect being told, but she pleads against a required descent down underlit steps with: 'It comes at a very important part of my lyric. Why can't I just stand there and sing?' She gets her chance to do just this at the end of the film; it may be bravura in a vacuum, but it is a vacuum not unlike that at the end of *Funny Girl*, planned to be ravishing. Again the performer's effort grows to such privacy that it banishes the fiction of an audience and closes unapplauded upon silence, followed behind the credits and the long-held last image of the star by a reprise of 'Evergreen', with its faith in love's perennial bloom. Esther's head is flung back on the last pounding beat of 'Are you watching me now?' and the atemporal punch of the freeze frame, which so many recent commentators have noted in other films as a visual metaphor for death and the stoppage of time, is here clearly meant as a flight from time into the thrilling fixity of art.

Perhaps it is merely the last brave failure in this passionately executed instance of popular art, a movie pushing and presumptuous in the way all original art must be, a movie by turns splendid and empty. Pitted against the timidities of the script, the musical numbers of *A Star Is Born*, the best of them, still have the nerve and invention of a great film experience. But we have a right as re/viewers to ask for more, and Streisand has it in her. Pauline Kael's polemical essay on Streisand as an endangered species of actress-singer was called, in an allusion to the words of her title song in *Hello Dolly*, 'Keep Going', and when Streisand sings to us in 'The Woman in the Moon' to 'Keep on pushing', we should even now want to say the same to her. With a script that would finally let her acting sing, there is no telling what wonders her singing might enact. On record, her last medley in *A Star Is Born* is an incandescent *tour de force*, at once nuanced and huge. On camera, and with too little characterisation behind and within it, the number must seem to many strangely depleted, even preening. But it knows what it is after, if not yet quite how to get there, and its high intent is the essence of Barbra Streisand's as yet only fractionally tapped promise as a creative artist. ■

Richard Combs

ALDRICH'S TWILIGHT



'Twilight's Last Gleaming': the nuclear silo

Ever since he unleashed the Atom bomb at the end of *Kiss Me Deadly*, Robert Aldrich seems to have been looking for creative ways of confronting the apocalypse. In terms of plot, he has never been at a loss for a desperate situation, and stylistically his films are suggestive of life-and-death traps. Bottled by a style that is all abrupt transitions, harsh angles and dialogues covered in one—rather than two—shots, his characters never seem more than a short distance from the end of their tethers. The resulting hysteria, however, has nowhere to go, except into banked up theatrics (*The Big Knife*, *The Killing of Sister George*), unless it touches, through context or metaphor, on deeper oppositions and confrontations.

Interestingly, during the political agitations of the 1960s, Aldrich's career seemed to be zigzagging off in cynical search of adventure (*The Dirty Dozen*, *Too Late the Hero*), but in the relative stasis of the 70s, he has found resolutely clear images for

situations of deadly stand-off: between white and Indian in *Ulzana's Raid*, between Nixon's America and its detainees in *The Longest Yard*, between open government and the policies of paranoia in *Twilight's Last Gleaming*. From *Ulzana's Raid* onwards, the films become tighter and more disciplined, their metaphoric edge keener, as Aldrich closes in on emotional, physical and political dividing lines.

Ironically, while Aldrich continues to be known as an action director—perhaps as the director of big, all-male, all-action adventures—his films have become increasingly self-conscious and introverted in their terms, their theme rather the frustration of action. *Ulzana's Raid* is a conscious reworking (and reversal) of the liberal rhetoric of the earlier Aldrich-Lancaster Western *Apache*. Perhaps the most soured of all Aldrich's recent movies, *Hustle* is also the most 'difficult', in that it advances a fashionable sentimental thesis

about downtrodden cops and dispossessed middle Americans which it then proceeds to tie into knots. Aldrich's interior intent seems to be to block off the avenues of self-pitying escape which the script opens up for the characters, even while sinking deeper connections between their humiliations and corruptions, and defining the central romance between Burt Reynolds and Catherine Deneuve as a strange case of both sexual and cultural masochism.

The deviousness of these tactics gives the films of the last five or six years the look of action subjects made by an intellectual director. By comparison, *Twilight's Last Gleaming*, a political thriller adapted from a tediously written potboiler, is surprisingly open, direct, even naive about its deeper concerns—can nations survive when nuclear weapons are the ultimate trump in power politics? does a government deserve to survive when those same politics force it to deal dishonestly with its people?—an intellectual film made by an action director. An odd turnaround, which for a while works to the film's disadvantage, in that the plot calls initially for some twenty minutes of frenetic action, developed briskly but with little resonance—a group of convicts, led by a dishonoured Air Force general, take over a nuclear missile silo to hold it for ransom—before the larger issues can be broached.

The flatness of this opening section could be due to a number of things, perhaps not least the fact that the film was shot in unfamiliar territory (two-thirds financed by the West German company Geria, it was made entirely in and around Munich), and that with the exception of the editor Michael Luciano, Aldrich was working without his regular team. (He has, however, fully commended the German production crew, especially designer Rolf Zehetbauer. Without official co-operation, the makers constructed the sets for the underground launch centre and various military installations from available documentation; whereas information from American sources was eight years out of date, the West Germans had access to a wealth of material as little as two years old.)

This section of the film is marked also by extensive and uncharacteristic use of long and middle-distance shots, and it is not until ex-Brigadier General Lawrence Dell (Burt Lancaster) and his makeshift commandos have established themselves on the site—code-named Silo Three—and their confrontation has begun with the President, his advisers, the commander of the Strategic Air Command and other military units that Aldrich more comfortably adjusts to a close-up intensity of style. Given that the excitement of what follows derives purely from his ability to invest any amount of discussion and political manoeuvring with a peculiar shock and energy, one wishes that a more radical solution had been found for the stock business of the beginning, perhaps eliding the convicts' seizure of Air Force uniforms and transport, their infiltration of the silo and the confounding of tricky passwords.

What Aldrich and his writers have added to the cynical terrorist plot of Walter Wager's novel—and what constitutes the film's open political challenge, its basic fear for the

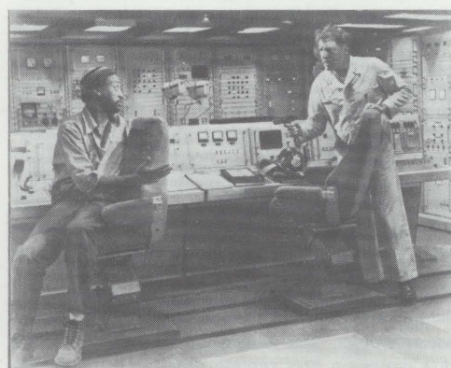
Constitution and American democracy—is the issue of the Vietnam war. Dell's demands for the surrender of the silo now include not only safe passage out of the country, substantial compensation in dollars, and a hostage in the person of the U.S. President, but also the public broadcast of a secret document revealing Vietnam to have been nothing more than an exercise in limited warfare—a demonstration for the benefit of other super-powers of what, within the unthinkable limits of nuclear war, the United States was capable. As a participant in the war, Dell it seems was 'politicised, radicalised' by his discovery of the real issues. Subsequently a nuisance to the Air Force, he was railroaded into a long prison term after a bar-room brawl led to his arrest for manslaughter.

As mooted here, within a kind of Hobbesian view of the world and its rulers—the President and his cabinet (and, by implication, all politicians) govern in isolation, according to the most basic notions of retaining and exercising power—the idea emerges in a naive but profoundly pessimistic morality play: a national crisis of conscience played out in the shadow of potential holocaust. By lying to the American people, its argument runs, the government—in the person of its solitary leader, since responsibility or authority is scarcely ever more widely dispersed in Aldrich—has sacrificed the credibility of the system to bolster the myth of Presidential credibility. Because no policy was ever created for containing the threat posed by the world's nuclear arsenal, these weapons have become the ultimate counter in a game of political bluff conducted in the dark. 'Open government or the imperial Presidency' is the alternative eventually laid before President David Stevens (Charles Durning) once he is made fully aware of the deceit over Vietnam. But in Aldrich's formulation, it is no longer a question of policy but survival, and the present system may be too far gone to change its ways. There is a dreadful finality about the way the film begins. Over a frozen shot of the Statue of Liberty at sunset, the words from 'The Star Spangled Banner' which now form the title are handwritten across the screen, to the accompaniment of a pen's scratching on the soundtrack—suggestive, perhaps, of a promise stillborn as the song was being written.

The intensity of the pessimism derives wholly from the formal limits that have been set to the subject. Where the forces of white and Indian culture, or of conformity and insurrection, play freely within *Ulzana's Raid* or *The Longest Yard*, the option for 'open government' seems doubly frustrated within *Twilight's Last Gleaming* by the hectic montage of boxed close-ups. Aldrich's style is supremely expressive of the 'imperial Presidency', concentrating all that he knows, or imagines, about the processes of power in the personalities of the powerful. During his sessions with the heads of government agencies, as Stevens learns, apparently for the first time, of what has been done in previous administrations to maintain the balance of power, and as it becomes clear that the military can do nothing to resolve the situation at Silo Three, group shots steadily give way to an isolated framing of the President. Responsibility for the nuclear paranoia and for the secretiveness of govern-

ment must finally be his, even if he can do no more than offer himself as a martyr. In order to bring Dell and his men out of the base, Stevens agrees to go to Silo Three to become their hostage, fully aware that the military establishment would willingly risk his death to eliminate the convicts.

Perhaps the prime tension here, as in all Aldrich's films, is between the visual representation of enclosures and hierarchies (the very image of secret government) and the attempt, dramatically, to forge horizontal links and allegiances. *Ulzana's Raid* details 101 tyrannies of father-son relationships, but sketches only one competing fraternal bond, between Lancaster's scout and his Indian colleague. *Twilight's Last Gleaming* offers a similar cross-racial friendship, between Lancaster's renegade General and one of his gang, the black Willis Powell (Paul Winfield). This remains somewhat perfunctory until one unexpected exchange when Powell, angered by Dell's faith that the President will come to them, argues that the military might be preparing a trick similar to *I Was Monty's Double* or setting



Paul Winfield and Burt Lancaster

midgits to lie in wait for them. To which the puzzled Dell answers earnestly: 'There are no midgits in the United States Air Force.'

But whatever hope exists for growth or change is not centred on the 'big guns' in the cast: Dell retains sympathy as a rabid anti-Establishment figure, but is too unbalanced to promise much for the future; Richard Widmark's SAC commander is a rabid professional, tempted to try his own hand at nuclear brinkmanship when he orders an attack on Silo Three, gambling that Dell won't be able to carry out his threat to launch the Titan missiles against their unknown but irrevocably programmed targets in Russia and China. The acting burden really falls on Charles Durning, in his progression from the political hack who occupies the White House to the individual who accepts the cruel obligation imposed by a 'dilemma without a solution'. The most idiosyncratic though probably the most 'brotherly' relationship in the film is that between Stevens and his aide (Gerald S. O'Loughlin), whose support of the President takes in one outburst of hectoring abuse and one of stricken breakdown—after Stevens is shot, along with Dell and Powell, who try to use him as a shield in their getaway. This moment is given full Greek tragedy measure by Aldrich, and made to seem all the more primitive by being instantly relayed on the

giant monitor screens in SAC headquarters. Conceivably, Stevens' transformation was further rounded out in two scenes with his wife, played by Vera Miles, later completely cut by Aldrich in order to shorten the film. (The English distributors have done extensive abbreviating of their own, trimming an early scene involving Roscoe Lee Browne which makes clear Stevens' initial opportunism, ditching a strangely emotional scene between the President and his aide, so losing this special relationship, and removing most of the discussion of the Vietnam document, whose contents must now seem as mysterious as the fizzing box in *Kiss Me Deadly*.)

In narrative terms, *Twilight's Last Gleaming* is as austere and pungent as anything Aldrich has done. Even the dishonoured split screen makes a brilliant comeback, first compacting events in a double panel, then proliferating in sequences that are a multiplicity of fragments and viewpoints. But again, cutting across the locked-in quality of the visuals, Aldrich draws connections between characters and mirrors seemingly disparate attitudes, if only in the end to conjure an exclusive pessimism about the political scene. A range of symbolism dignifies Stevens' passing as the death of American idealism: his 'innocence' is paraphrased in the shots of him through a White House window, veiled by curtains as he unbelievably studies the Vietnam paper; his doomed mission is anticipated in the quick close-up of blood on his cheek as he shaves, and in the shot of the plane silhouetted against the setting sun as he leaves for Silo Three. Similar overtones cling to Lawrence Dell, who in one scene is also given a dressing-down for his crazy faith by his 'aide'. In the opposite corners, squaring the innocent idealism of these two with childish anarchy, are Garvas (Burt Young), the happily inefficacious third member of Dell's team, and Stevens' military advisers, who zealously refer to the siege of Silo Three in football terms.

The indictment is complete, and twilight settles into night, with the last-scene dereliction of Melvyn Douglas' Secretary of Defence—the Stevensonian liberal who promises to broadcast the Vietnam paper if the President fails to return from Silo Three, then draws back, as the dying chief executive repeats his request, from the prospect of being the last honourable man. Having proposed the total bankruptcy of the system, Aldrich's solution would clearly not be an overhaul but, as he has suggested in an interview (*Film Comment*, March-April, 1977), when talking about the political picture he would really like to make, its total suspension for a period of time: 'The only solution for this is some kind of benign "ism"—I don't care what you call it: socialism, fascism, statism—to take over for a ten-year period in order to get at the root causes of all our problems.'

Given the thriving contradictions of Aldrich's form of attack—totalitarian in style and method, democratically levelling in content and effect—it is difficult to see (all claims to the contrary notwithstanding) whether such a solution would put him on the left or right of the political spectrum, or simply in the position of a radical and iconoclast unlikely to be embraced by either.

Film Reviews

Riddles of the Sphinx

The Oedipus myth is one of the most fascinating in all of culture. It was not for nothing that Freud borrowed its name and its most notorious features to represent what he called the nucleus ('Kern') of human sociality. Not only the history of each individual, according to Freud, but the whole of social (or species) life is marked by the institution of a prohibition on mother incest and on parricide. The individual becomes a social being by accepting this prohibition, which at the same time permits the regulation of reproduction and of social authority.

But there is more to the story than that. The elements that Freud seized on, the parricide and mother incest, may be the nucleus of some versions of the myth, but there are other elements—equally susceptible of Freudian interpretation, but different from the one for which Freud is principally remembered. What the story also recounts is an historical transition from mother-right to father-right (how accurate this history is is open to question) and in the development of the child a transition to dependence on the father and on social law.

The key figure in this account is not Oedipus himself, but the Sphinx. In the story, before Oedipus gets to Thebes, and before he can carry out his hidden destiny, he encounters a monster who asks him questions. When he answers her questions successfully, the monster—Sphinx—destroys herself. Classically these questions are about life and death, birth and old age, but what matters is not just the form of the questions, or Oedipus' ability to answer them, but the figure of the questioner herself, female but only half human, who stands outside civilisation and threatens it.

By resuscitating the Sphinx as title-figure of their new film, made for the B.F.I. Production Board, Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen—both of whom have written extensively about psychoanalysis and the cinema—are posing a challenge to Freud and to orthodox interpretations of the Oedipus complex. They are, in a sense, asking the Sphinx's own questions, asking them of the audience but also asking them of Freud and questioning why the concept of the Oedipus complex was set up in such stark patriarchal form. To some extent the questioning is explicit, as in the second section of the film where Laura Mulvey (following a strategy first explored by the authors in *Penthesilea*) speaks direct into camera with the voice of the film-makers. But it is also carried on implicitly throughout the rest of the film, notably in the central narrative section where the Sphinx is present as Voice Off, not an authoritative commentator from above, but a questioner from below. And there are also questions asked of the Sphinx, the film camera's probing of a picture of the Great Sphinx of Gizeh, which on zoom-in inspection reveals not an essence but particles of film grain.

An interrogation of Freud, therefore, but also an interrogation of film—of the rights and capacities of film to 'represent' its subject matter, whether that subject matter be a conceptual enquiry or a story of everyday life. A lot of the puzzlement expressed (with varying degrees of sympathy or hostility) towards the

film stems from a chicken-and-egg uncertainty as to which came first: the film's formal devices, its intellectual enquiry into Freud, or the story of Louise and her child. For most people, I suspect, it is the narrative which has priority, with the result that the 'philosophical' content (most overt in the flanking sections) is easily adjudged to be 'tacked on', while the formal expression (conspicuously the 360° pans in the central, narrative section) is found 'distracting' or 'contrived'. Contrived it certainly is, but that is precisely the point. Narrative, after all, exists through the telling of the story, not just in the story told; spectators may prefer the economical transparent narration produced through invisible editing, but it is that preference which *Riddles of the Sphinx* (The Other Cinema) sets out to undermine. What the contrivance does is not so much distract from the telling of the story as insist upon it, insisting that the story is present only in the telling, in the coincidence of camera and object. Meanwhile much of the film is not story at all. Even in the narrative section, what is offered to the spectator is often tangential to the developing story of Louise, her husband, child and woman-friend. And the outer sections lose Louise and her story entirely.

What the outer sections of the film do is give to the inner story a different context from the one it would have if it stood alone as a record of a woman's life, replete with realistic details of her kitchen, her workplace, her environment. Although to some degree the problems evoked are those of 'real life' in its most obvious manifestations, and therefore feed into the politics of marital relations, child care or women's labour, the 'framing' (whether the spatial framing of each shot or the temporal framing of the narrative within the film as a whole) constantly suggests other concerns. One of these is formulated by the Voice Off, in the form of a question: 'Can there be a politics of the

Unconscious?' Even before it is stated as such, however, it has been adumbrated in various ways, both in the spoken account of the film given by Laura in the second section, and in the evocative dredging of mythic imagery there and in the third section, and again in the formal movement of the narrative section itself. Significantly we do not see Louise in full figure and full face, or hear her voice in synch, until some way into the narrative. Her speech is taken over by the Sphinx; her body is a partial object in a world of other partial objects, merged with child, toys, utensils in the filmic space. Social life—nursery, workplace, trade union—then gives her an identity, but she remains defined by a construction of which the Sphinx's voice is always an element, speaking to her from both inside and outside, asking questions 'life' does not answer.

This sense of a construction is then reinforced towards the end of the narrative when, in a room full of mirrors, showing Louise and her friend directly or in various reflections and reflections of reflections, we catch sight of the camera in one of the mirrors, inexorably propelled by its (woman) operator on its circular course. This is more than the banal self-reflexivity mandatory in much 'experimental' film. It is a precise moment of recognition, of a breaking out from the false sufficiency of narcissism, but still within the enclosure of an artificial space. Here, as in the 'puzzle ending' which concludes the film, we are invited to recognise the extent to which we are made by the meanings we are forced to construct, or that have been made for us. The meaning that *Riddles of the Sphinx* constructs is not arbitrary, even if it seems at times remote from what most of us would like to regard as the everyday sense of experience.

It remains to ask to what extent *Riddles of the Sphinx* stands or falls on its theoretical claims alone, or on any single set of claims that it might appear to make. The answer to this question must surely be that the theorising, whether of Freud or film, is integral to the project, but that the film can be grasped from a number of different angles, and each one delivers its quota of interest and pleasure to the spectator. Such openness is a precious quality in the cinema, whether commercial or avant-garde, in both of which coercive strategies have often reigned supreme. To find a film which crosses the frontiers of different audience expectations, which is unassuming and yet rigorous in its intellectual stance, and pleasurable and provocative at the same time, is rare indeed.

GEOFFREY NOWELL-SMITH

'Riddles of the Sphinx'





Alain Delon in 'Mr Klein'

Mr Klein

The vulture is transfixed by an arrow, but still it flies. Behind the opening credits for *Mr Klein* (Gala), a tapestry in the style of Alexander Trauner sets out the theme of Joseph Losey's new film, his first in French. The tapestry is intricate, elegant, symmetrical. One encounters it with curiosity and relish, but also with detachment. It expresses, with a fine economy, an abstraction of everything that is to follow.

The film's second image provides the counterpoint. A pathetic, dumpy little woman submits to the medical examination that could certify her racial origin as non-Judaic. Nude, meek, vulnerable, she could already be an occupant of one of the camps she is striving to avoid; her dignity discarded with her clothes, her existence is rendered purposeless even as she tries to maintain it. Outside the surgery, she walks slowly into impenetrable darkness and we never see her again.

The unsparing scrutiny to which she has been subjected is applied to each of the film's characters in turn; *Mr Klein* is punctuated by silent close-ups, a succession of faces that are at best speculative, at worst apprehensive. Like hers, they are masks of ambiguity, simultaneously innocent and guilty. The contradictory impulses give each of them—newspaper editor, police inspector, lawyer, factory-girl, concierge—an identical air of weary melancholy. Transfixed, their futures are still in the air, for a while.

The pale-eyed Mr. Klein, small-time (the German name is well chosen) dealer in art-works, is the link between these haunted inhabitants of the material world and the cerebral serenity of the tapestry. Through Klein, the people of Occupied France, no longer certain in 1942 of their own Frenchness, can exchange high art for hard cash, the abstract for the real, the irrelevant luxury for the chance to survive. Klein's role, he explains hastily but unconvincingly to the first visitor we see, is an embarrassment to him—he would prefer not to be involved. The phrase could come straight out of *The Sorrow and the Pity*, but automatically one thinks too of Losey's brush with the McCarthy era, when witch-hunting was again fashionable. It seems logical that France and Losey should explore a common experience. Klein must learn that he is involved.

Later, at an auction, the tapestry is briskly explained. It depicts, says the auctioneer, greed punctured by remorse; ancient cabalistic designs in its corners hint at the perpetuity of the conflict, and at its ritualistic nature. Klein buys the idea, if not the tapestry, and jokes about it when visiting his invalid father in pursuit of birth certificates. It comes as no surprise when he is closely studied by an unexpected hostess that she likens him to a vulture, except that so far he has shown little sign of remorse. The other Mr. Klein, whose life insists on overlapping his, gets likened to a serpent, hibernating until the moment comes to strike—and he too is linked with a tapestry, although one of simpler imagery. Somewhat obscurely, he is also said to be a lapsed flute-player, a clue which perhaps is resolved by his leading the headlong rush to destruction at the end of the film.

Not that *Mr Klein* has many loose ends. It is a detective story of deceptive clarity, leading crisply and inevitably through a trail of clues to the dramatically satisfying conclusion that both Mr. Kleins (and Losey plays fair by showing both of them on the screen at the same time in at least two sequences) share the same fate. The hunt wastes no time from the moment Alain Delon finds a redirected Jewish newspaper on his doormat, uncovers the original address, and pursues every lead—a photographer's ticket, a showgirl's boot, a sheet of music—he finds in the other Mr. Klein's flat. On the level of sheer narrative, *Mr Klein* is dazzling to watch, each scene constructed with almost casual ease; a single panning shot, for example, conveys the car journey through frozen darkness to the Xavier château, while another single shot, of superlative fluency, covers Klein's receipt of the invitation to Ivry-la-Bataille.

In parallel to Klein's search are the abrupt, foreboding glimpses of the preparations for the round-up in which he will ultimately be trapped—the map of Paris looming over its controllers, the records office with its towering files and clattering typewriters, the partitioned sections of the Austerlitz terminal, the police vehicles rehearsing in the wet streets at dawn. The menace of these unexplained interludes finally breaks cover at the Vélodrome d'Hiver, where the stadium terraces are a turmoil of the dislocated and the dispossessed. Losey's construction work here is faultless.

And yet *Mr Klein*, rather like its own story, seems to have two characters, separated by a wide gulf. On the one hand, the gallery of faces, superbly chosen, immaculately performed; on the other, Trauner's vulture and Losey's ubiquitous mirrors. The sense of period is precise, but Losey hasn't denied himself a touch of rococo here and there. The double reference to *Moby Dick*, for example, is surely twice too many, while the Strasbourg clocks make too easy an impact. That the obscenely anti-Semitic cabaret should be constructed around Mahler's 'Kindertotenlieder' also appears an unhelpfully complex piece of self-indulgence. But these, one suspects, are what maintained Losey's interest in the production; the colourless Mr. Klein becomes more intriguing when one is being encouraged to identify a link between his fascination by the van Ostade painting and the renegade Dutch branch of the Klein family.

For *Mr Klein* is a chilly experience. It speaks of man as a single species, but its characters remain at a distance from each other and from us. The horror of the Occupation and its betrayals is something we should be sharing as a potentially current danger—but it remains coolly in the past. Klein, selflessly played devoid of charm by Delon, gets what he deserves—but it's difficult to care. Losey has created a wholly admirable work of art, properly transfixing our greed by our remorse, but its flight is only an illusion. It's all done, you could say, by mirrors.

PHILIP STRICK

The Late Show

In 1967, Robert Benton co-wrote a terrific movie, *Bonnie and Clyde*. Five years later, on his first try, he directed a terrific movie, *Bad Company*, a commercial flop. That was another five years ago. Now, we can be grateful that Robert Altman got into producing, for he has enabled Benton to make *The Late Show* (Columbia-Warner), a murder mystery/detective yarn which like all Altman's own genre exercises has a little bit extra.

In it, Art Carney plays ageing private eye Ira Wells, who comes out of retirement to take on a case begun by his equally aged friend and former partner (Howard Duff), who made a mistake on it and died. At first, the case involves finding Lily Tomlin's cat, which has been kidnapped. But as it grows more complicated, and the clues lead to trails that multiply, extending deeper and deeper into a sleazy Los Angeles, and the bodies begin to pile up, Carney and Tomlin join forces. She's a non-stop talker and explainer of unessentials, and does a lot of little things—mostly badly—for a living. He's just a private dick, a survivor of the Depression, the Cold War and the unchanging shiny mean streets, who hires out for \$25 a day and expenses, proof by his own exclamation that he is 'no low-rent gumshoe'.

Together . . . well, they're not Mr. and Mrs. Smith or Bogart and Bacall/Astor or Nick and Nora Charles, who are mentioned at one point, a small generation-defining moment in the film, as Carney rasps out William Powell and Myrna Loy and Tomlin, puzzled, can only summon up Peter Lawford and Phyllis Kirk. (In spirit, Carney and Tomlin are a bit closer to *Murder by Death's* Dick and Dora Charleston, without the finery and manners.) It could be that Benton is pointing out a new trend in designing and writing his film for a male/female duo, restoring primacy, if non-sexual, to a form of classic cinema product that has developed with the 70s into a carefully heterosexually accounted for, buddy-buddy combo.

Like some of Altman's films, *The Late Show* subsumes a detailed, warty, road movie portrait of Los Angeles. The terrain is more familiar from the mass of 60s blaxploitation movies,



'The Late Show': Art Carney and Lily Tomlin

whose chief value often lay in their off-the-cuff authentic locales, than from the TV action shows. (Compare, too, how the *Dirty Harry* films all look like crisp travelogues for San Francisco.) If Carney shows the ravages of time, Tomlin and their mutual friend Bill Macy, who figures in the thick of the plotting, show the ravages of living in Los Angeles too long. The final shot of the film is one of those solid bus-stop benches; its advertising message, 'Mingle with the stars at the Hollywood Wax Museum', rings out like a conscience or a fate-knowing prediction.

Benton's model for *The Late Show* is a composite of *The Big Sleep* and *The Maltese Falcon*. (At one point, Carney is framed beside a studio portrait of Bogart as Philip Marlowe, and there's a photo of Martha Vickers on his dresser.) Like *The Big Sleep*, the story-line is complicated beyond the telling of it, fully to the extent of Chandler's untraceable who-killed-Arthur-Geiger-and-why. There's a young, itchy gunsel worthy of Elisha Cook, Jr., the bulky overcoat replaced by a snug cashmere jacket, and a mysterious, smoothly lying glamour lady (Joanna Cassidy), who reeks of sex and wears 40s dresses and hairstyle. There is also an adroit, Production Code-ish use of blood: Carney following a trail of blood through a quiet apartment; the aftermath of a murder on a waterbed; and Macy, shot, staring incredulously at his own blood dropping on to his clean white bucks. Since Carney and Tomlin scramble through the plot just behind the killers, Benton is able to maintain a tone of uneasiness and suspense without the constant use of gaping wounds and spurting blood. Maybe the 70s decreed the film's final shoot-out (as it did in *Marathon Man*), but Benton has neatly reversed the domineering cynicism encased in such films which demands an unhappy ending.

But unlike the B-grade programmers alluded to, there are rough edges here, an overall smoothness sacrificed mostly to the actors, who come through admirably. Altman's influence is much more discernible than his role as producer and the use of his multi-track sound system. A few metaphors seem calculated and out of step: Carney is introduced in the first scene in his room watching a late movie on TV (a motorcycle epic, nicely implying that even 'The Late Show' no longer offers images of his past culture), but a moment later, as his partner

lies dying, the clear TV picture has dissolved into snowy distortion. At another point, Benton makes too much of a body secreted in a refrigerator, which we know Tomlin will discover sooner or later as she potters about the kitchen while we wait with other characters and dialogue in another room. It doesn't work because it's a drawn-out, dead-end moment, while the rest of the film continually surprises us.

Ultimately, the film is a study of friendship and of age and ageing. Tomlin comes up with a motive for Carney's obsession with following the case long after her cat has been recovered—that it's not a revenge motive for the death of his friend but his last chance to play the detective, chase bad guys and wave guns around. Carney's infirmities show on him (Tomlin has just as many, but they're inside, invisible). His face is weary. He must remove his hearing aid before firing his gun. He'll be felled not by a bullet, like Duff, but by his perforated ulcer, and he suffers a crippling ulcer attack in a restaurant. In action, Carney is as much out of breath after beating up a hood as when he's been beaten up by him. But at the end, he coolly takes advantage of his detriment, his age, and of other people's notion of ageing, by faking an ulcer attack to get the drop on the gun-wielding hood. He alone figures out who did what to whom and why, and we have to strain to follow him as he blurts it out, Bogart-style.

The film begins and ends with Carney cradling the head of a messily dying friend, one older and one younger than he. *The Late Show* does not sentimentalise ageing as much as to validate certain aspects of it. So did *Harry and Tonto*, in which Carney made a voyage of discovery, learning from but also teaching those younger than himself. Perhaps Benton is taking note of the fact that the median age of the U.S. is increasing, roughly following the present around-thirty generation, a product of the post-war baby boom.

If Benton sentimentalises anything, it is in homage to the hard-boiled, tough-talking Bogart detective movie, evidenced in Chuck Rosher's moody colour film noir photography, Ken Wannberg's multi-themed score, Carney's verbal cataloguing midway through the film of the traditional 'loner' image of the private eye, and in many small details, like Carney's continued use of the word 'dolly' in talking to

and about Tomlin. So much for image: Carney ends up preparing to move next door to Tomlin, but there are no promises made. I hope there are no sit-coms in their future. In any case, Benton has succeeded brilliantly in revitalising an overworked genre without destroying its mythology.

DAVID BARTHOLOMEW

Demon Seed

The tyranny of machines, or of a society run by machines, has perhaps been the single most consistent nightmare in science fiction. But the nightmare has become less luridly dramatic and more casually chilling the more closely men are seen to be developing towards machines, and vice versa—as in the space travel segment of 2001. The end result of this process may be the way things are forecast in *Demon Seed* (CIC): a kind of double tyranny, in which computers are so sophisticated that they have organic insides and contain 'all of human knowledge', but are still only servile pieces of machinery until they can overpower their creators and claim some freedom of choice, movement and propagation.

'When will you let me out of this box?' is the plangent protest of Proteus IV when he is switched on at the beginning of *Demon Seed* by the scientists who have constructed him on behalf of the Icon research institute. Despite the destruction he causes when his request is ignored, Proteus' plight is viewed with some sympathy (and the fault, by weird implication, is largely the scientists', for their failure to understand his emotional problems). Certainly there is pathos at the end when Proteus, having 'investigated eternity' and seen the futility of his existence, and after doing his best to reproduce himself in an independent form, commits suicide by shutting down his circuits. But if this promises rich material for a black comedy, it is sadly unrealised here, remaining at some half-formed ironic level in a film which seems uncertain just how seriously to take itself. The makers have settled instead for a chic, anything-goes mood, crossing and confusing the Computer's Lib theme with more fashionable material (Women's Lib, ecology, scientific hubris, demonic possession) than their shaky narrative can stand.

One incidentally interesting aspect of the film is its strong suggestion that whatever Donald Cammell (here making his solo debut as director) contributed to the conception of *Performance*, that film's visual and thematic cohesion were probably the work of his collaborator Nicolas Roeg. *Demon Seed* might be striving after a similarly powerful metaphor for its age—some equation between scientific rapine and what the resentful Proteus eventually does to the heroine—but it lacks the integration of *Performance*, its perceptive blend of the popular subversions of pop and drug culture with the identity-riddling philosophy and fiction of Hermann Hesse and Jorge Luis Borges. *Demon Seed*, moreover, is very uncomfortably directed: the performances are stilted and metallic (whatever is supposed to be assumed about robots taking over), and the perfunctory visuals leave the ramshackle plot dangerously over-exposed.

It is a story, in fact, which Roger Corman could have made some years ago into a great black-and-white Z-feature, with all sorts of cliché devices sustaining an outlandish central situation. When Proteus proves unhelpfully pettish, the scientist in charge, Alex Harris (Fritz Weaver), decides temporarily to shut down his input and output terminals. But he has forgotten the terminal in his own house, which Proteus promptly activates, taking over all the electronic household gadgetry and making a prisoner of Harris' wife Susan (Julie Christie). (They are estranged; she, a psychiatrist, finds

it impossible to live with his cold detachment.) After some violent resistance—especially when Proteus announces that he can only transcend his physical limitations by having a child with her—Mrs. Harris is subdued and impregnated. Meanwhile, a friendly lab technician, summoned to the house by an earlier distress call from Susan, is fobbed off by Proteus with a fabricated image of her, but returns to be decapitated after a terrific fight with Proteus and his minions. At the end of the 28-day gestation period, Dr. Harris, having apparently spent all this time at the lab, realises what might be happening and rushes home in time to witness the final incubation. Without revealing the ending, it may be said to be spiritually derived, without the accompanying religious irony, from *Rosemary's Baby*.

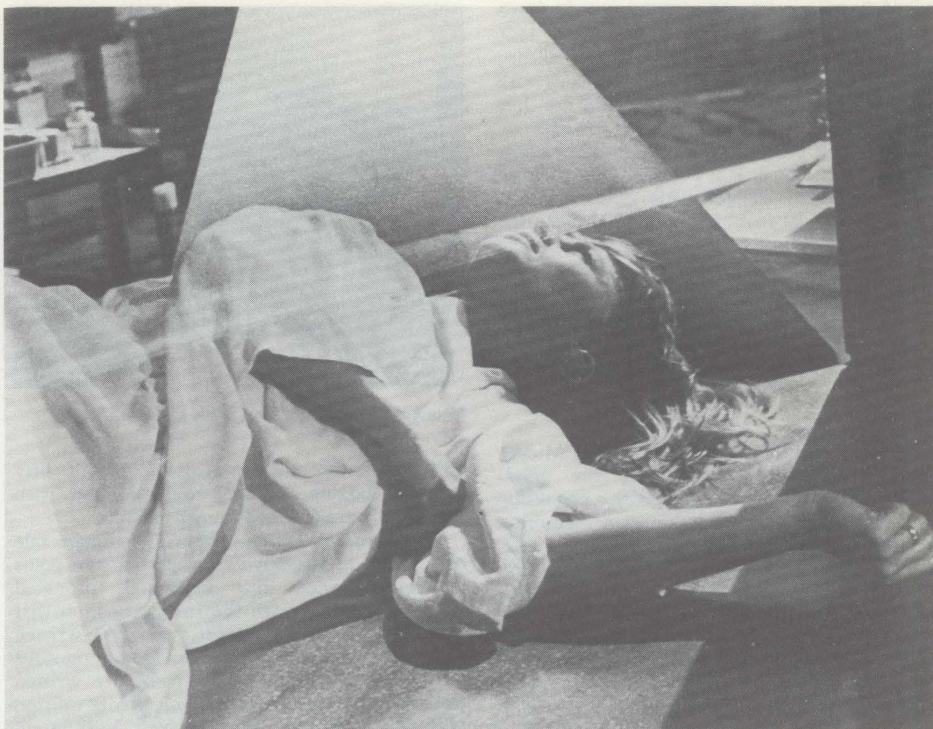
Given that most of the film is taken up with the duel between liberated woman and male chauvinist computer, these sequences are peculiarly disappointing. Partly this is due to the orgy of special effects, with Jordan Belson's abstract light and colour sequences illustrating Proteus' thought and speech patterns, and Proteus not only commandeering all the 'Environmod' appliances in the house but constructing his own assistant, a free-moving, geometrically fluid object, capable of mutating into all kinds of tools. But largely it is a result of the way Cammell fudges his themes. A couple of early scenes, showing Susan at work with a child patient, are presumably meant to demonstrate her self-sufficiency and capability, though given the unsympathetic presentation of the child, the effect is more to demean her work as mollifying spoiled brats. A clear identification is made between Harris' unfeeling attitude towards her (and his unreflecting devotion, perhaps, to scientific progress) and Proteus' later treatment of her. At one point, Harris turns towards her a pair of spectacles which he has been repairing, and which she has dropped and broken, while muttering, 'We have different visions of the world'; Proteus later uses the closed-circuit cameras in the house to track her in a similar way. But if Susan's contest with the computer represents some further extreme of her unhappy marriage, it is worked out rather tediously on the level of domestic spats, occasionally with some humour but more often with her simply attempting to overcome her jailer with force.

A slightly more disturbing ramification is that the film eventually allows the audience to enjoy her helplessness and humiliation just as in many a more direct rape fantasy movie. In fact, all the super-technology, whether on display or under attack, fails to disguise some basic dramatic deficiencies. One is that Proteus, running amok apparently from the moment he is plugged in, comes across too glibly: we need more motivation, even from machinery. Another is that our thoroughly modern heroine is made to behave as if she were a Griffith damsel, struggling in helpless rage rather than fainting terror, but still merely putting up a titillatingly fruitless fight before the beast has his wicked way.

RICHARD COMBS

Rafferty and the Gold Dust Twins

Rafferty and the Gold Dust Twins (Columbia-Warner) is the lost movie Dick Richards made in 1974 between *The Culpepper Cattle Company* and *Farewell, My Lovely*, and differs from those pictures and his current project, the Foreign Legion adventure *March Or Die*, in being set in the contemporary world and not being a genre film, unless we have come to regard the road movie as a genre. But it is clearly the work of the same soured romantic, and certain pre-occupations and themes can now be discerned, most notably the very American notion of a



'Demon Seed': Julie Christie menaced by the computer

world of orphans looking for surrogate parents and families. Like *Culpepper*, it has a runaway teenager being corrupted by the adult world, and even a specific reference to the earlier film when a crazy itinerant evangelist, the Reverend Culpepper, is introduced, offering salvation in his mobile tabernacle. There are also scenes that closely parallel the sequences of *Farewell, My Lovely* in which Marlowe reluctantly returns a precocious fugitive to her uncaring parents and takes a parental interest in a black boy whose white father has been killed through the detective's intervention in the family's life.

Like the narrator of *Travels with My Aunt*, Rafferty (Alan Arkin) is an archetypal passive square who is drawn first forcibly, then willingly into accompanying an amoral adventuress on a journey that leads to his acquiring a new family. In Rafferty's case it is two girls, the foul-mouthed 15-year-old Frisbee (Mackenzie Phillips), who's on the run from a New Orleans orphanage, and her beautiful string-bean companion Mac (Sally Kellerman); and oddly enough he ends up as Graham Greene's Henry Pulling does, on his way to Paraguay. After being raised by foster parents, Rafferty has been cocooned by twenty battle-free years in U.S. Marine training camps, anaesthetised by alcohol, and continues to live in the past as he works as a driving examiner in Los Angeles. Richards' camera first locates this lonely unkempt slob as he's about to pass out at a gathering of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, before showing him waking up in his crummy bed-sitting room, its walls decorated with portraits of Marilyn Monroe, and shaving to Doris Day singing 'It's Magic' on his transistor. Even the car in which the girls force him at gunpoint to drive them from Hollywood to New Orleans is a badly preserved 50s relic.

Rafferty does not have the consistently assured tone of Richards' other pictures, and this absence of calculation gives it a warmth and emotional unpredictability they lack. Unquestionably, though, it is on the surface a comedy, and it is Rafferty's discovery that the gun Frisbee held to his head only contained blanks which persuades him to throw in his lot with the girls. The trio head for the glittering Mecca of losers, Las Vegas, where a crazy drop-out (Alex Rocco) attempts to attach himself to them by providing advice at the card table to the fast-losing Rafferty, a meal in a

smart restaurant (setting fire to the tablecloth to avoid paying the bill), and drink (stolen from a liquor store). They reject him and drive on, robbing, cheating and seducing their way to Tucson, home of Mac's father, a grim stockyard cowboy (John McLiam), the imperious rancher of *Culpepper* and *The Missouri Breaks*, who dismisses his daughter as a 'hippie slut'.

Richards resists the temptation to contrast his characters with the crass, ugly world through which they pass, and the travelling trio do not attempt to ingratiate themselves with us. Rafferty is surly, taciturn, dim and full of irritating mannerisms; Frisbee is snarling, contemptuous, ungraceful; Mac has an easy whorish charm and unlike the others seems positively to enjoy conning people. The characters have to fight for our affections and we gradually edge towards an understanding of their hidden wounds.

The picture concludes with a virtuoso sequence at a seedy Country and Western saloon outside Tucson, which accounts for the final third of the running time. The bar's atmosphere of boozy bonhomie conceals an underlying aggression, just as Richards' apparently casual treatment of the scene disguises a tight dramatic development. During the evening Mac switches partners, moving over to the leader of an itinerant country band who engages her as their singer; Frisbee makes an initially unrecognised play for Rafferty's affections; and a scabrous one-legged Vietnam veteran (superbly played by Harry Dean Stanton) joins them, to be rejected by his former girl friend Mac, then by his fellow ex-Marine Rafferty, and finally by Frisbee, who beats him at pool. The subtle emotional shifts take place without the characters quite realising what is happening during a communal version of 'You Are My Sunshine'. This warm-hearted, near-sentimental scene is followed by a brutal pay-off outside in the cold night air when the crippled ex-Marine attempts clumsily to seduce Frisbee, and a policeman coming to arrest her is only prevented from shooting her down by the desperate intervention of Rafferty in his first spontaneous positive act.

It is only at this point that Frisbee's origins are revealed, and the natural bleak ending would have been to have left Rafferty alone in the night deserted by both girls. Richards has been criticised for appending a final scene in which Rafferty (now disguised as a proper

citizen) arrives at the New Orleans orphanage posing as Frisbee's long lost father. This fanciful little coda, however, is by no means inconsistent with the overall tone, and ends with a new variation on an old joke. Where are they driving to, Frisbee asks him. South America, he tells her, to a plantation an old comrade owns down in Uruguay, or is it Paraguay? In the past when people said 'Uruguay—or is it Paraguay?', they'd clarify the matter by saying 'I mean the democratic one', or 'I mean the police state.' Now that both countries are under harsh totalitarian regimes it doesn't really matter.

PHILIP FRENCH

Rocky

'Dipper's a contender, a climber,' yells Mickey (Burgess Meredith), comparing the good-hearted nobody, Rocky Balboa, with a promising new boxer working out at his gym. 'You're a tomato.' Paulie (Burt Young), an obtuse meat-packer, later warns Rocky, who is in love with his sister Adrian, that she too is a loser. 'She's pushing thirty,' he says. In the end, however, Sylvester Stallone's Rocky disproves both Paulie and Mickey and reaffirms that part of the American dream which holds that every loser is a potential winner. He succeeds in drawing Adrian out of her shell to reveal a loving woman, and he goes the distance with Apollo Creed, the black heavyweight champion of the world, so proving—as, one is reminded, Terry did in the exhilarating, bloody finale of *On the Waterfront*—that he is not 'just another bum from the neighbourhood'.

Never concealing its intention to please, *Rocky* (United Artists) at first engages the viewer's sympathy by boldly sketching the hopeless existence of its innocent, thirty-year-old hero who, when not collecting bad debts for Gazzo, an avuncular mafioso, or rehearsing passable but unappreciated jokes for Adrian (Talia Shire), is picking up pin-money taking punishment in boxing rings on the club circuit. But Rocky is redeemed by a trusting nature (refusing to break the thumbs of one of Gazzo's debtors) and by a clear-eyed optimism out of all proportion to his bleak awareness of his own limitations. One affecting sequence has Rocky delivering a heartfelt lecture on clean living while walking home with a girl he has extracted from a group of street-corner toughs; at her front door she responds with a good-humoured obscene gesture, leaving Rocky to muse that, judging from his own life, he really has no right offering anyone else advice.

Then the impossible happens and the film speeds off into fairyland: Creed needs a white opponent for a fight in Philadelphia, the historic home of American independence, on January 1st, Bicentennial Year; since no class boxer is available, Creed, as a gimmick, gives Rocky a shot at the title. Rocky takes on the previously derisive Mickey as trainer, goes for dawn runs, spars with sides of frozen beef in Paulie's plant, and then, against even his own expectations, gives the champion (who has entered the ring dressed as Uncle Sam) an impressive but not decisive whipping. The film ends with Rocky, having won his measure of self-esteem, embracing Adrian with his first positive declaration of love. Since the film has aimed all its punches so accurately at the viewer's heart, it seems beside the point to wonder what Rocky will actually do with his \$150,000 purse.

On one level, *Rocky* is as insubstantial as marshmallow. John G. Avildsen's direction of Stallone's own script (written, it is said, in three days) fearlessly connects with several debilitating romantic clichés: Rocky running round Philadelphia followed by a lolling bull mastiff, sprinting up the steps of the art museum at sunrise and twirling on the top in triumphant slow-motion; Meredith's overblown, gravel-voiced trainer portentously pointing to his scars



'Rocky': Carl Weathers, Sylvester Stallone

and cauliflower ear as evidence of his fifty years of boxing acumen. Rocky's affair with Adrian is pure and unashamed hokum.

The Lords of Flatbush, that affectionate tale of a group of Brooklyn teenagers on the point of being tipped into adulthood, provided British audiences with the first intimation that Stallone, one of its players, who had written most of his own dialogue, possessed a vigorous talent for delivering his own sharply written lines as well as for creating comic scenes infused with the authentic flavour of New York street life. These talents are manifest throughout *Rocky*: Stallone, who is rarely off the screen, keeps attention firmly on himself thanks to his stream of engaging, repetitive, poetically modulated and often amusing thoughts (he describes himself, for example, as 'a plate of left-overs', a cage of budgerigars as 'flying candy').

Apart from the striking physical presence of its star, *Rocky* stays primarily in the mind as a series of moments: Rocky casually picking up a man slumped against a wall, carrying him into a bar and depositing him beside another old soak—'Here's a friend for you'. The best are cleverly built to suggest that the protagonists have a depth to their lives which transcends the transparent artifice of the plot. On his first date with Adrian, Rocky bribes an attendant to let them into a closed skating rink. As Adrian totters round the edge of the ice, Rocky jogs behind, producing tattered photographs, enquiring if she is enjoying herself and explaining why he became a boxer. This touching and sustained scene sharply brings home the fragility of their relationship, but also, as Adrian's confidence increases, its possibilities; the ultimate circumscription of their lives, however, is emphasised by the attendant's periodic announcement of what remains of their allotted time on the ice.

Rocky, Stallone's alter ego, is sufficiently engaging to make one forget, momentarily at least, the script's milk-fed lack of originality. *Rocky* is as calculated to warm one's heart as *Love Story* was to make one weep. It remains to be seen if Stallone can withstand the pressures which will undoubtedly be placed upon him to repeat *Rocky*'s runaway success, and instead redirect his considerable and original comic talent towards a script which looks forward instead of back down the paths of formula movie-making.

JOHN PYM

Immoral Tales

The Borowczyk archipelago is composed of many islands, among them those of Goto, the Kabals, and the remote castle home of Blanche. With *Immoral Tales* (New Realm), the dark cartographer introduces us to another four examples of isolation, tiny communities of adventure formed as if by specimens trapped at random in the circle of a microscope, or by exotic animals caged in a private zoo. Despite the prudish label, the four tales, plucked from

history in reverse chronological order (as how else by the maker of *Renaissance*?), turn out to leave questions of morality resolutely to the eye of the beholder; the behaviour of their characters is not being challenged, merely observed. One can pick out hints here and there of Borowczyk's own opinion, not that he would regard it as important; it's expressed in the vernacular of editing and emphasis, in the images repeated often enough during the performance of his quartet to suggest an inclination behind the detachment, a preference behind the impartiality. But as with the merciless Madame Kabal, the people of *Immoral Tales* are assertively independent of their creator, and live by their own rules in total disregard of ours or his.

Their independence, however, does not give them freedom. Borowczyk's islands are habitually penal colonies, and his four *contes* are alike in their atmosphere of confinement. The tone is set by the Mandiargues story *La Marée*, in which a pontificating youth arranges to be trapped with his 16-year-old cousin on a tiny strip of beach at high tide. Their release from this predicament can only be achieved sexually, after which the tide retreats, of course, and can be expected to return in due time. Similarly, the girl has learned her lesson and will be required to revise it periodically.

While initiation of this sort into relationships of increasing complexity is a theme of the quartet as a whole, the theme of captivity also goes beyond the geographical, the political or the punitive. As illustrated by *La Marée*, the tides of sensuality beat on the shores of every human being; he may record them, like the youth with his watch and his timetable, but they are controlled by other forces and he is ultimately helpless in their grasp. Thus the initiations hold no traumas for their participants; the girl on the beach shows every sign of having been there before, and her successors in the film demonstrate a like complicity. They are prisoners partly because they have no choice, and partly because they relish their imprisonment. It's like a re-run of *Jeux des Anges*, Borowczyk's animated fable of a hideous alien world of victims and sacrifices—except that all the horror has gone. But the beauty, the rituals and the organ pipes have remained.

The second tale, of the Normandy girl Thérèse (Charlotte Alexandra) who was elected a saint in the 1890s after having been raped by a tramp, concentrates on the ecstasy of the girl's devotion to God, an ecstasy again expressed in subservient and sexual terms after she has been locked away for coming home late from Mass. The hapless instrument of her solitary initiation is a cucumber, its suitability for the task in view of shape, symbolism and fecundity being noted by Borowczyk with an equal amount of humour at what might be termed its shortcomings (the thing falls apart and gets trodden into the carpet). When this tide has ebbed, the girl escapes through the window of her prison into a meadow; a tramp promptly materialises to make gleeful assault upon her piety. Whether gaoler, demon or animated cucumber, he's the key to her future.

The pattern continues in the third and fourth episodes (as, for that matter, it did in the fifth, *La Bête*, which Borowczyk sensibly extracted for astonishing expansion into a separate feature). From the casually coital enclosure of a farmyard, Hungarian peasant girls are rounded up in 1610 to be taken to the Castle of Csejta, there to be processed, after much soaping and fondling, into bathwater for the Countess Erzsebet Bathory (Paloma Picasso). Destined to notoriety for her habit of soaking in the blood of young girls, the Countess maintains a charmingly appointed residence of cubicles, spy-holes and split-level bedrooms (the designer, naturally, is Borowczyk himself), and it forms an elegant trap for her rapacious and submissive victims. The initiation ceremony for this flock of giggling nudes is part sexual, part masochistic and totally fatal, the tide of their deaths leading

to the rejuvenation of their Mistress, who lives on in beauty to bathe again. Yet she too is trapped—by the need for fresh victims, by the passion for her page-boy (who not surprisingly is female), and by the laws both of the land and of sex. As Thérèse was captured by the tramp, so the Countess is arrested by soldiers, her immaculate castle invaded at last by militant masculinity.

Which leads us to Lucrezia Borgia, her hair plaited fetchingly under her chin to frame her face in echo of Blanche, Glossia, Rosalie and many others. Willing accomplice to the relaxations of her brother the Cardinal and her father the Pope, she is enclosed in a Vatican antechamber, her unmourned husband removed by scuttling guards and attentive clerics. Stirred, as was her counterpart in *La Bête*, by the spectacle of a well-endowed stallion, Lucrezia (Florence Bellamy) joins zestfully with her relatives in an assortment of unions; she's in no position to argue, but she has no evident regrets. Later, her son is baptised by his Papal parent, and the film ends on the infant's cheerful face. Borowczyk claims the ending was insisted upon by his producer (Anatole Dauman, who has sponsored so much of his career) in order to establish the normality of this offspring of incest. Whatever, it's the perfect conclusion. Not only does it complete the cycle of rebirth and resurrection, it also leaves us with an expression of seraphic innocence, an eagerness to study the world's perpetual repetitions without prejudgment. That eagerness is Borowczyk's own, reinforcing the point that morality is irrelevant in the stories we've been shown. They provide information, nothing more.

Nothing less, either. From his earliest films, Borowczyk has contemplated the energy of the inanimate—the dolls, the photographs, the phonographs, the furniture of the past. Scattered relics of other times, these memorabilia still speak with the moods and motives of their former owners. With his reverence for textures, colours and juxtapositions, Borowczyk allows the icon as much life as its user, and logically he now examines the icons of eroticism with the same mingling of respect, curiosity and affection. His *Immoral Tales* are compiled from a succession of such 'erotic' images as gulls, candlesticks, tapestries, breasts, jewels, lace, rough wood and tangled triangles of hair. Dusky red patterns slide across glowing flesh as the Countess takes her blood-bath, immediately followed by the patterns of water gliding down the steel cover of her tub. For Borowczyk, the fascination of both images is the same, yet he's aware that we all tend to make an automatic distinction between them. With a seductive attempt at innocence—a little forced, but only a little—he'd like us to wonder why. Fellow-prisoners, we're surely entitled to our own share of ecstasy.

PHILIP STRICK

Une Partie de Plaisir

'If a man could pass through Paradise in a dream, and have a flower presented to him as a pledge that his soul had really been there, and if he found that flower in his hand when he awoke—Aye, and what then?' Why then, in belated response to Coleridge's question, you might have *Partie de Plaisir* (Artificial Eye), Chabrol's desolate and desolating portrait of a man driven to destroy himself and everything he loves because he held that flower in his hand and casually threw it away.

In the opening shot, the camera pans over a stretch of rugged coastline, picking up a man strolling along with a child perched on his shoulders while a woman calls to him from the dunes above. In a sort of capsule social history of the sexes, as the child plays contentedly nearby, man the hunter then assumes his prerogative of facing unpleasant realities (baiting

fishhooks with live crabs), while his shrinking, admiring mate delightedly responds, with only a passing nod to propriety, to his suggestion that they make love then and there. Cut to a placid country mansion; a brief intervening shot of man, woman and child in a boat on a rough sea; then, as though they had safely weathered the primitive stage in their evolution, a scene of exquisite harmony as this family literally blooms into happiness within the sheltering walls of their home.

The radiance of these early sequences is immeasurably enhanced by the fact that the family in question is a real one: Paul and Danièle Gégauff and their daughter Clémence. No actors could achieve the absolute complicity evident, for instance, in the scene where Philippe (Paul Gégauff) teases the child about the bedtime story he means to tell her while she bounces in secret glee over her knowledge that she is really going to get 'Little Red Riding Hood' once again. Although it is unsafe to assume too high a percentage of autobiographical confession in this script written by Gégauff immediately following his break-up with Danièle (he admits to one-fifth of it as being his own story), the sense of personal involvement certainly informs Chabrol's elegiac camera. Gégauff, after all, has worked regularly with Chabrol since *Les Cousins*, and first met Danièle when she was working as an extra on *Les Bonnes Femmes*.

As in *La Femme Infidèle* and *Juste avant la Nuit*—making *Partie de Plaisir* seem almost like the completion of a trilogy—the ideal presented here is the bourgeois one of the *status quo*, with a closed world jealously guarded against any intrusion or interference from outside. The difference, however, is that where the initial rift was exposed by marital infidelities in the earlier films (both scripted by Chabrol alone), the cocoon in *Partie de Plaisir* carries its own inbuilt flaw, gradually widened by the small earthquake tremors occasioned by time and change. Philippe, unlike the two 'Charles' played by Michel Bouquet, is not really a true bourgeois except in his determination to preserve this *status quo*. For one thing, he is not actually married to Esther (Danièle Gégauff); for another he is content, rather than pursue an honourable and profitable profession, to live off a small but adequate income derived from his property. Like the archetypal Gégauff character played by Brial in *Les Cousins*, in fact, he is what one might call an intellectual aristocrat,

high-handed and self-sufficient.

His happiness, with a wife he has moulded and a child he is fashioning according to his own vision of perfection, is an intellectual construct of his own principles, predilections and prejudices. Having tasted it, as it were, and seen that it is good, he is then tempted to add the finishing touches which will lift his masterpiece to new and dazzling heights. And in a scene rich in ambiguities despite its evident basis in intellectual geometry, he invites his wife (first confessing his own casual infidelities and pressing her to admit to similar affairs that she clearly hasn't had) to join him in a mutual pact of sexual freedom that will leave their relationship enriched but untouched.

The result is disaster as Philippe spirals into frantic jealousy—not because Esther takes him at his word, but because the lover she chooses fails to measure up to his exacting standards—and begins to react with escalating violence to this unwarranted rape of his conceit of paradise. What he has failed to acknowledge, of course, is the impossible paradox he has introduced into his position by first building a dream based on the woman's traditional role of subservience, then inviting that dream to assert its independence.

A transformation inevitably occurs, recorded by Chabrol and Gégauff with scrupulous impartiality. First, the mordantly witty party sequence in which we are invited to share Philippe's outraged distaste for the lover Habib (Gian Carlo Sisti), a guitar-strumming, lackadaisical first cousin to Victor Mature's Dr. Omar in *The Shanghai Gesture*. Then, as Philippe bursts in to reclaim Esther from his bed in a room festooned with carpets like some gaudy oriental bazaar, the realisation that Habib has a curious dignity of his own quite alien to the tenets of well-bred *savoir-faire* hitherto laid out for us.

It is this very Brechtian notion of change (also informing the structural division of the film into three sections, corresponding to the process of social evolution from rustic simplicity to urban pressure) that makes Philippe's desperate attempt to turn the clock back and recapture his dream so moving. Gradually discovering the same dignity and new-found strength in Esther, Philippe falls in love with her all over again, never realising that time has passed him by, leaving him the baffled prisoner of his own conceit.

TOM MILNE

Paul and Danièle Gégauff and their daughter in 'Une Partie de Plaisir'



Black Joy

Twenty-four years ago, the cameraman Walter Lassally commented on the directorial method of Anthony Simmons, the barrister turned filmmaker with whom he had worked on two impressionistic shorts, *Bow Bells* and *Sunday by the Sea*: 'My own view is that . . . using only a small camera, exploiting actual locations and getting under the skin of the inhabitants pays rich dividends; so much so that I wonder sometimes whether British feature films would not benefit from a more spontaneous, less cumbersome, closer-to-life approach.' Lassally had in mind the development of a British school of neo-realism; it never materialised, but Simmons' two subsequent independent features did go some way towards demonstrating the validity of this reflection.

Four in the Morning (1965) and *The Optimists of Nine Elms* (a children's story written by Simmons which, after various setbacks, was finally made into a film in 1973 with Peter Sellers in the role at one time intended for Buster Keaton) both peeled open the specifically London lives of their protagonists. Neither film, however, did resoundingly well at the box-office. Now with the arrival of *Black Joy*, his third feature, shown at Cannes but at the time of writing without a British distributor, it seems that Simmons, without turning his back on earlier achievements, has returned to familiar locations (the East End, a seaside town) and familiar themes (the survival tactics of the isolated individual in London), this time determined to make an upbeat, deliberately entertaining popular movie.

While searching for a non-existent address in

Brixton, Benjamin Jones (Trevor Thomas), a tough, handsome but ingenuous 'country boy' freshly arrived in London from Guyana, is effortlessly exploited by everyone he meets: he is robbed by a small boy; gives handouts to a phony preacher at an over-night hostel; pays a deposit on an already occupied flat; and falls in with Dave King (Norman Beaton), an unscrupulous Jamaican loafer, who cons him into a succession of loans and later, when Ben has moved into his ramshackle flat, persuades him to go to work in order to support them both.

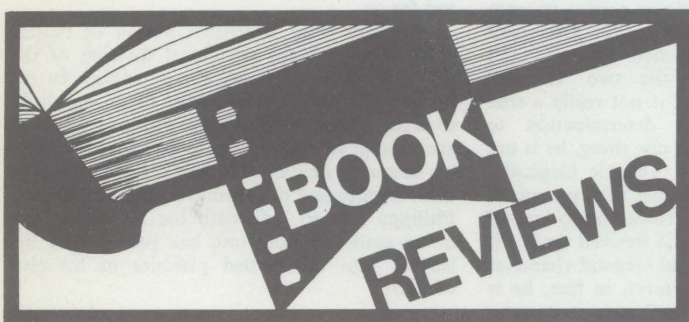
The industrious Ben accepts all this chicanery until at last, having fathomed the depths of Dave's beguiling sponging and also having picked up his art of survival, he finds the courage to stand up for himself: he refuses to redeem a smart Buick which in a moment of desperation Dave was forced to sell him for £50. The film ends with our expectations artfully reversed: a loan shark, to whom the car rightfully belongs, approaches Ben and attempts to coerce him into parting with it. The signalled violent climax, however, never materialises. When Ben again refuses and holds him against the car to emphasise the point, the loan shark simply laughs and walks away; Ben, who can't drive, is left to lurch down the road (to the accompaniment of the song 'Black Joy') seated beside the now admiring youngster who first robbed him.

Based on the play *Dark Days and Light Nights* by Jamal Ali of the Black Theatre of Brixton, *Black Joy* is, as its title and content suggest, a predominantly optimistic and sometimes sentimental work, perpetuating stereotypes (the feckless, cheerful Jamaican, for example) and ignoring many difficulties of immigrant life

(money is never a problem, even on Ben's dustman's wages). The film—an admirable entertainment—succeeds on a higher level, however, thanks largely to the authority of Trevor Thomas' performance: he convinces us, even in the film's occasionally contrived encounters (an opening conversation with a fellow Guyanan), that Ben is indeed an innocent, genuinely unaffected by the world's wickedness. The fragmentary scenes of West Indian London life are a reflection of Ben's mutely incredulous perception of the city in the same way that the grim vistas of the Thames were a reflection of the desolate loneliness of the two couples in *Four in the Morning*.

Simmons sketches the vignettes of which the film is almost exclusively composed with an assured hand: a wasted visit to a prostitute; the pecking order within a dustmen's gang; the incidents in the tentative course of Ben's romance with the street-wise sister of Dave's long-suffering mistress. Despite Simmons' claim that he could equally well have made the film about Cypriots in Camden Town (and that he will regard it as a failure if it plays only in Notting Hill, where part of it was shot), *Black Joy* remains essentially a black vehicle. By swiftly cutting between a multitude of locations, rarely pausing to underline a plot point, and by bridging the elliptical passages in the pared-down narrative with a succession of vibrant West Indian songs, Simmons effectively directs attention away from the plot's clichéd view of immigrant life. The film is sustained too by a consistent flow of vivid, extremely blue and often extremely funny West Indian dialogue.

JOHN PYM



KING LEAR: THE SPACE OF TRAGEDY

By Grigori Kozintsev

HEINEMANN EDUCATIONAL BOOKS, £8.50

Grigori Kozintsev was the most attractive and the purest human being among the giants of Soviet cinema. He remained to the end astoundingly youthful. He was slim and slightly stooped. His thick hair had hardly any grey. His voice had an odd, high-pitched crack. His eyes were very dark and bright, and when they were not looking at whoever he was listening to with the total attention that was his gift to give, they were searching in the middle distance for some relevant connection from his extraordinary store of memory and knowledge.

He was always so youthful that it was a profound surprise that he should have died, in 1973; and unbelievable to realise that he was then approaching seventy (he was born in 1905). But then you remembered that he went back incredibly far into the beginnings

of Soviet film and Soviet art. He was one of the crazy boys who careered around the streets in the heroic era of the Revolution, yelling at the tops of their voices the latest Mayakovsky poems. He was 16 when with Trauberg and Yutkevitch he started the Factory of the Eccentric Actor (FEX); 19 when the group made their first film. It was characteristic, though, that he never let himself be trapped and rooted in the nostalgia and the legend. He writes with gentle amusement about later critics and psychoanalysts who take notions thrown off in the enthusiasm of the moment and turn them into systems. 'Even the craziest contrivances are deciphered; everything is rearranged and becomes a miracle of harmony; there are no artists—only thinkers. And meanwhile one forgets what real life is like—only aesthetic systems are discussed.'

Kozintsev never forgot what real life was like. Living when he did and where he did, he saw a lot of it. Like the rest he had his difficulties. *Simple People* was

made in 1945, but released in 1956. Kozintsev, though, was one of the very rare ones of whom no one tells tales of disloyalty or cowardice—and they were weaknesses not easy to avoid or to blame in those years. He does not dwell on the times, though in passing he recalls, for instance, his friend Boris Eichenbaum: 'Those were bad times for him. Once he telephoned me, and I heard his voice down the telephone saying, "Congratulate me. My name is in print once again. Here in the *Medical Journal*: the case of patient X. The capital X is me. "In spite of serious symptoms the patient is still alive.' "' The bad times and the delirium of FEX were stored side by side in his experience.

Peter Brook's foreword to the book, a last letter to a dead friend, speaks of 'your wish to speak through your art about one subject only: about humanity—no more, no less.' Kozintsev himself has a funny story which reveals how central and single was his theme. He relates how he went to see Polanski's *Repulsion*, and found himself terribly unsusceptible to the horrors, until the moment when the heroine leaves the bath tap running. Then, he recalled: 'I broke out all over in a cold sweat; the horror at the thought of quarrelling with the people on the next floor down, the unavoidable repairs, drunken painters. . . Nightmares suffocated me. Pictures each more terrifying than the last sprang to life; rooted to the spot, I could no longer tear my eyes away from the screen.'

King Lear was his last film; and

in the future we may well grow to greater appreciation of its marvels: the intimacy with which Kozintsev discovers the tragic man, and at the same time the range of the echoes of Lear's tragedy, so that it becomes finally an image of a whole society in disintegration. For Kozintsev the important thing was that man still survived: 'Shakespeare saw a black cloud encroaching on history, a black death threatening to annihilate history, to return it to primeval horror. And he expressed it with all the demonic power of tragedy. But he also wrote of how Cordelia found within herself the strength to say "no", and of Edgar's brave behaviour, and, first and foremost, of the fearlessness of Lear's thoughts. . .'

Kozintsev's diary (translated by Mary Mackintosh with a sensitivity that avoids any sense of the second-hand) is a singular record of the creative process of interpretation, of a mind of exceptional range and understanding exploring Shakespeare and Shakespeare's world, but always coming back to his own. Tragic heroes, he says, are more real than living mortal people. 'They do not die, they come to life again with each new generation and again accompany them along the same path.' No one, he comments, can produce an 'irrefutably correct' Shakespeare production: 'Neither Stanislavsky, Craig, nor any other theatrical genius could have done it, because the production of a Shakespeare play is the reflection of his poetry in the moving space of time.'

In the course of the years of



Yuri Yarvet in Kozintsev's 'King Lear'

work, Kozintsev explores every scene, every line, every character, shakes off all the accretions of theatrical and literary convention and dross. He turns for help to Dostoevsky and Gogol and Tolstoy (who didn't like Shakespeare but in the end *became* Lear) and the Book of Job; to the British Museum, Kyoto, a typhus epidemic remembered from his youth, FEX, Mack Sennett (he likens *Lear* to a Keystone chase), the memory of the delight when his school went west in the bombardment of Kiev; all the life he had lived. 'People are afraid of noises, of words, they are afraid of their own thoughts. . . This is my idea of the black death. I saw more than enough of this sort of darkness or black death in my early childhood.'

There were, finally, four great pillars in Kozintsev's creative existence: Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Craig and Brecht; but above all Meyerhold. There were others he admired, people like Artaud and Peter Brook, who shared the gift of fearlessly attempting the impossible in their art. He relates the story of Craig's famous 1911 *Hamlet* at the Moscow Art Theatre, and the absurd common reality behind the legend: the failures, the quarrels, the famous screens which looked so thrilling on paper and were so disastrous—nearly lethal, even—in fact. When metal, then wood, proved impractical, they were flimsily made in canvas. Kozintsev speculates on their eventual fate, forgotten and rotting in the scenery store, and finally burnt with the rubbish. But this sort of reality—the disaster and ridicule and rot—do not matter. "Great successes" have vanished from our memories, but the "flop" of the 1911 production is still alive. . .

Certainly it lives in Kozintsev's two great Shakespeare films, and

in his book, and in his special sense of a human and timeless creative community. Kozintsev's image for this community is a relay race, which may not always achieve the Olympian ideal: 'Someone steals someone else's fire for a light—from one who has devoted his whole life to propagating it—and having lit his cigarette with it, spits on the flame, in order to avoid a whole crowd trying to throw asbestos on it.' 'Dear Grigori. . . ' runs Peter Brook's *envoi*, 'Humanity was your theme and through your book you can still pass it on to others.'

DAVID ROBINSON

THE MAJOR FILM THEORIES: AN INTRODUCTION

By J. Dudley Andrew

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, £2.50 (paperback)

The widespread distrust of film theory still persisting in mainstream criticism is scarcely confined to Anglo-American film culture. Less than a decade back, when Noël Burch's *Praxis du Cinéma*—later translated as *Theory of Film Practice*—first appeared in France, someone at Gallimard hit on a rather demented sales pitch, and the book was marketed with a wraparound banner boldly proclaiming, 'Contre toute théorie'. The curious science fiction tone of this declaration highlights a subterranean bias which informs most film reviewing on and off the continent: the idea that theory is an option best left to dusty academicians, while everyone else is better off operating on free-floating intelligence and intuition. Ironically, this is an assumption which expresses a theory of its own: that knowledge is essentially empirical. And the definition

accorded to 'empiricist' by the *Concise Oxford* may be worth at least considering: '(person) relying solely on experiment; quack.'

In all fairness to 'anti-theorists', it should be conceded that science and art are hardly the same thing. If a sizeable part of our knowledge of the former is grounded in theory, the *parti pris* underlying our knowledge of cinema tends to be a much more random affair, a generally murky blend of half-examined predilections and working hypotheses. Yet it is precisely here that theory becomes a useful tool even to the non-specialist: a working model that can serve as a test to one's own assumptions. And the bracing value of J. Dudley Andrew's guidebook—subtitled 'An Introduction', and clearly designed to indicate some of the more accessible routes into diverse kinds of material—is that it is virtually the first in English to cover a relatively broad range of figures.

Andrew establishes his *modus operandi* in a succinct introduction, which promises to compare theorists on questions about 'raw material', 'methods and techniques', 'forms and shapes' and 'purpose and value'. He then proceeds to explore theorists in three successive categories: 'The Formative Tradition', 'Realist Film Theory' and 'Contemporary French Film Theory'. The first of these includes not only Arnheim, Eisenstein and Balazs, but also Hugo Munsterberg, a fascinating pioneer whose seminal work in 1916, *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* (re-published in America in 1970), has so far received scant attention in England. Bazin and Kracauer claim the section on realist theory, while Mitry, Metz and—rather more unexpectedly—Amédée Ayfre and Henri Agel (along with brief acknowledgments of Burch and the 'militant critics at *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Cinétique*') comprise the survey of contemporary French theory. Overall, a somewhat conservative list, but one that is useful enough for Andrew's purposes. If some of his treatments skirt areas that more specialised studies have examined in depth (cf., in particular, Martin Jay's revealing essay on the career of Siegfried Kracauer in *Salmagundi* Nos. 31–32, which appeared at roughly the same time as Andrew's book), and one regrets in particular the avoidance of any detailed discussion of Vertov, he generally remains lucid and convincing on his chosen figures.

There are no 'objective' accounts of theory any more than there are 'objective' theories, and it seems worth indicating something of the nature of Andrew's own bents. For the most part, his expositions of Munsterberg, Arnheim, Eisenstein, Balazs and Kracauer seem unusually detached and judicious, pointing up the peculiar strengths and limitations of each without suggesting that he has any particular axe to grind. His less questioning admiration for Bazin diverts this tendency somewhat; and the

subsequent chapters on Mitry and Metz, however respectful, hint at a certain dissatisfaction with much contemporary theory which helps to explain the decision to end the survey with Ayfre and Agel. Arguing that the materialism of the semioticians and the determinism of writers like Michel Foucault closes off too many possibilities of exploration within the notion of 'art as freedom', he cites the phenomenology of Ayfre, Agel and Roger Munier as a viable route leading back to some of the avenues opened up by Bazin.

A debatable conclusion, but Andrew takes great pains not to overstate his case: semiotics 'may someday teach us how cinema is possible and why it generally looks the way it does. Phenomenology will continue the more uncertain venture of trying to describe for us the value and importance which all of us have sensed within certain moments of cinema.' And the likeable thing about this conscientious study is that, far from seeking to cancel out the potential benefits of any theoretical approach, it endeavours to establish terms for a disciplined but supple discussion where agreements and disagreements alike can be rationally formulated.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

LE DOSSIER ROSI

By Michel Ciment

STOCK, PARIS

Not for nothing is this book about Francesco Rosi by one of the editors of *Positif* described as a dossier. Designed as a sort of do-it-yourself kit for approaching Rosi and his work, it contains not only a critical essay and extensive interviews, but a series of invaluable 'documents'. Detailed *curricula vitae* for Salvatore Giuliano, Enrico Mattei and Lucky Luciano, for instance. Extracts from Tullio Kezich's report on the filming of *Salvatore Giuliano* in Sicily, from the records of the Viterbo trial (along with Rosi's version of it), from the Senate debate on Giuliano the year before his death, already alleging political corruption behind the Portella della Ginestre massacre. The texts of Charles Siragusa's secret report on Luciano, and of Mattei's last public speech before his death. Excerpts from an angry debate on building speculators by the Neapolitan town council, printed alongside the analogous sequence from *Mani sulla Città* . . . and so on.

What emerges forcefully from all this—confirmed by a number of articles reprinted from the Italian press in which Rosi's films become centrepieces for polemics about everything from the Mafia to town planning—is the astonishing (and on the whole remarkably consistent) political relevance of Rosi's work. It is fashionable to describe almost any film-making activity as political (cf. Straub's claims for *The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena*

Bach); but Rosi is one of the few film-makers to be political through a direct confrontation of politics in an *oeuvre* which might be described as a series of continuing reflections on the ambiguities of power.

The dominant influence, as Michel Ciment points out in his admirable introductory essay, is the Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, who 'virulently denounced the negative role of the intellectual in the *Mezzogiorno*, a region where disparity and exploitation assume their most monstrous form', criticising Italian culture for its failure to make contact with the masses through a popular national literature, but praising Verga and the Sicilians for their efforts to achieve this symbiosis. Himself a man of the South (he comes from Naples), Rosi almost predictably entered the cinema by way of Sicily and Verga as one of Visconti's assistants on *La Terra Trema*. His subsequent career, with its knack of stimulating public discussion of matters that assorted establishments would have preferred left under cover in films like *Salvatore Giuliano*, *Le Mani sulla Città*, *The Mattei Affair* and *Lucky Luciano*, has clearly taken him an appreciable distance along the road to Gramsci's ideal that the artist should 'cease to be an agent of the hegemony' and become an intellectual organically at one with the proletariat in furtherance of the revolutionary process.

Rosi's films, however, are form as much as content (he himself vigorously rejects the label of 'documentarist', arguing that his domain is the interpretation of facts rather than their reconstruction, and that the form of each of his films is dictated by the particular demands of its content). The facts in each case are laid out in a series of tableaux unequivocally open and above board in their implication; but through the juxtaposition of these tableaux, an equivocality begins to emerge through the yawning gaps evident between each disconnected 'fact', allowing one to glimpse a darker configuration beneath. In this light, it is surely significant that Rosi at one point nearly embarked on a career as a designer of comic strips.

This subterranean element in Rosi's art is perfectly illustrated by a round table discussion organised by the newspaper *Il Tempo* and reprinted here. A parade of politicians, each clearly uncomfortably aware of having been got at, first praise *The Mattei Affair* and then fall back on party political bickering in order to avoid confronting the vision it contains. It is left to the sociologist Umberto Eco to cut across the smoke-screen and point out the real drift of Rosi's work, the message that lurks in the gaps between its images. Observing that the central focus of the film is not Mattei but his death, Eco continues: 'The choice here was

Rosi's: the Machiavellian giant has been forced to submit and has, technically speaking, been killed. One must take this standpoint into account in order to understand certain emphases and certain omissions. He is killed by external forces, but this is also—and here a theme common to all Rosi's films is adumbrated—the suicide that Italy keeps inflicting on itself where its deep South is concerned.'

TOM MILNE

VISIONS BEFORE MIDNIGHT

By Clive James

JONATHAN CAPE, £3.95

Clive James, television reviewer of the *Observer*, follows the late T. C. Worsley and collects assorted specimens of his weekly columns into more substantial hardcovers. Like Worsley (who called his book *TV: The Ephemeral Art*), he stresses the medium's ephemerality (pointing out the inability of television criticism to refer readily to the past), and its multiplicity. These, he feels, television criticism must reflect, if it is to be truthful. James, however, is so dazzled by this scarcely radical insight, and infatuated with the spectacle of the absurd, the passing show of a profligate medium, that his writings become as ephemeral as the medium he purports to criticise. Like so many Fleet Street TV reviewers, he is a licensed jester, a Sunday morning entertainer with a ready wit and genuine verbal dexterity, a gagman who batters on the manifest and manifold absurdities of the small screen with all the joyful malice of a vampire embracing his latest victim, to the delight, so the book-jacket assures us, of 'countless fans'.

He boasts that 'other critics before me had submitted themselves to *Coronation Street*, and found it instructive, but no critic before me had ever regarded David Vine as a reason for switching the set on.' The conviction speedily takes root, as one reads the book and, say, its repeated celebrations of the deficiencies of BBC sports commentators, that the targets are too easy, that one vicious jab is sufficiently fatal, a truth not hidden from more modest reviewers.

It is often charged that television reviewers know nothing of television. In a column entitled 'What is a Television Critic?' James counters strongly with the statement that 'Most television critics know far too much about television: they are tube-struck in the way that most drama critics are stage-struck, and capable of every discrimination except the vital one of telling live inspiration from dead.' He has the grace to admit, however, that ignorance, even when allied to critical talent, is no virtue. Indeed the extent of the ignorance shown by present practitioners may be hotly dis-

puted in the BBC Club, but is hardly central to the wider issues of TV criticism. He cites the splendid (studio-based) adaptation of Muriel Spark's *The Girls of Slender Means*, and (correctly) points out the difficulty for the critic of detecting from the screen who was responsible for precisely what, whether producer, director, adaptor or script editor, implying that spotting names, *auteurs* even, in this context might very well be a foolish, if not misleading exercise. The obvious conclusion is however suppressed: that television programmes are collective enterprises dependent on the talents of the many rather than the few. That it's a debatable proposition demands and should secure some deeper exploration.

It doesn't, of course, for in the Jamesian school of criticism to be serious is a cardinal sin. What one misses is an awareness of the wider debates which have developed in and about television in recent years, such as the controversial nature of TV's claim to be an honest broker between reality 'out there' and the viewer, TV as a conveyor rather than a mediator of reality; an awareness that to characterise television as 'a thousand different things happening behind a window' is already question-begging. 'What a professional television critic ought to be able to contribute is the ability to assess what he is being told indirectly. He ought to know when a blurred message about something is really a clear message about something else.' On his own estimation, James conspicuously fails.

I have a vision before midnight of our intrepid reporter eternally closeted with the monster box, eyes agleam as he pounces rapturously on the latest howler from the lips of David Vine or Eddie Waring—a fate not, I think, undeserved.

PAUL MADDEN

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

TONY ALDGATE teaches at the Open University, has written a thesis on newsreel coverage during the Spanish Civil War and directed a compilation film on the subject for the History Film Consortium . . . A. J. GUNAWARDANA is a Senior Fellow at the East-West Centre in Hawaii, has written film and drama criticism and been a director of the State Film Corporation of Sri Lanka . . . JOHN HOWKINS is a journalist, attached to the International Institute of Communications . . . RICHARD DYER MACCANN, professor of film at the University of Iowa, is the author of *The People's Films*, a history of U.S. government film production, and was for ten years editor of *Cinema Journal* . . . GEOFFREY NOWELL-SMITH is the editor of *Screen* . . . JOHN PYM is Assistant Editor of the *Monthly Film Bulletin* . . . GARRETT STEWART teaches at the University of California, and has written for *Film Quarterly* and other magazines.

Letters

Paul or Acres?

SIR,—The clear appraisal by David Robinson for John Barnes' book *The Beginnings of the Cinema in England* (SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1977) has puzzled me so much that I used my Easter holidays to do some fact-digging in your country. As a foreigner I am completely indifferent to who was first in making and projecting moving pictures in your country, whether Mr. R. W. Paul or Mr. B. Acres. But I hope you will allow me to point your attention to some evidence I have found in favour of Mr. Acres. I only give five points, but there is still more evidence, and anyone who will take a little trouble and do the same as I did, will find it for himself.

1) You have a wonderful Science Museum in which two cameras are shown. One is the Acres camera, captioned by the Museum as 'Cine-camera by Birt Acres 1894-5. This experimental camera designed by Birt Acres represents one of the earliest machines in this country. It employs an intermittent "dog motion"—etc.' In the same case you find Paul's 'Animatograph', 1896. If you compare these cameras, Paul's letter written to Terry Ramsaye (quoted by Barnes on page 25 from Ramsaye's book *A Million and One Nights*) becomes confusing. It seems most probable that Paul was describing two cameras at the same time, his own and Acres'.

2) The Patent Office in London has registered quite clearly on May 27, 1895, the specifications of the camera made by Birt Acres (No. 10,747). R. W. Paul's 'modified' projector was registered only nine months later (No. 4686).

3) At the British Film Institute is a copy of F. A. Talbot's *Moving Pictures*, ed. 1912, thoroughly annotated by Mr. Acres himself. Of Paul's claim that he invented the first moving picture camera Acres writes in this copy: 'A deliberate lie!' And some fifty personal notes by Acres give the completely opposite impression of what Mr. F. A. Talbot, Mr. T. Ramsaye, and now Mr. John Barnes wants us to believe. Without taking careful notice of these annotations, I think any historical account of the early British cinema finds too insecure grounds.

4) As early as 1899, Henry Hopwood in *Living Pictures* gave a remarkably accurate account of the innovations of the taking and projecting of moving pictures, and his list of patents as registered by

the Patents Office is completely correct. (As I have checked, so that Mr. Barnes' remark in a footnote on the shortsightedness of civil servants seems unfair. The usual reason why registered patents are abandoned is that the inventor did not think so highly any more of his invention as to keep on paying the quite high fees.)

Anyway, Mr. Hopwood writes on page 97: 'It is certain that Mr. Birt Acres was working concurrently with Messrs. Lumière, for he photographed the University Boat Race with his 'Kinetic Camera' on March 30, 1895, only a few days after Messrs. Lumière filed their French patent, and before the deposit of their English one. In fact, Mr. Acres appears to have been beaten all through the race by a few days...' Isn't that something to think about?

5) Oh, yes, there are more quite trustworthy reports from the scene itself, once you start digging. For instance, the magazine *Photography*, April 23, 1896, page 277: 'The Kineopticon'. 'It has been known for a considerable time past that Mr. Birt Acres has been working out an invention which should throw moving pictures upon a screen, so that the appearance of reality might be perfectly maintained and presented. As a matter of fact, we believe he was the first inventor in this direction to successfully exhibit such pictures in England, which he did several months ago, at a meeting of the members of the Royal Photographic Society...' etc., etc.

As I said, I innocently stumbled on much, much more. The only evidence in favour of Mr. Paul that has been given by John Barnes is what Talbot wrote about the so-called rough sketch which Acres should have brought to Paul, and the letter of July 23, 1924, which Paul wrote to Terry Ramsaye. Who was the first British film-maker, then?

Yours faithfully,

TJITTE DE VRIES
Rotterdam, Netherlands.

Australian Cinemas

SIR,—Together with other Australian readers, I was very interested to read Gideon Bachmann's article, *Films in Australia*, in the Winter issue. I would like to draw your attention to one inaccuracy at least and this relates to the price of cinema admissions in this country. Perhaps it was a typographical error in the issue concerned, but at the time of Mr. Bachmann's visit the average first run theatre ticket was A\$3.50, which has since risen to A\$4.00 (equivalent to £2.25 and £2.57). From the comments of local people who have been fortunate enough to travel through Europe and America recently, cinema admission prices in this country appear to be the highest in the world. Unlike many European cities or the major cities in the U.S., it is difficult to find many cinemas screening revivals at reduced ticket prices.

These very high prices are, the exhibitors say, to offset reduced income from falling attendances since the introduction of colour television. Maybe.

Yours faithfully,

MICHAEL CAMPI

Dingley,
Victoria, Australia.

Oxford Festival

SIR,—Encouraging and paternal as Nigel Andrews was towards Oxford's First International Film Festival (SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1977), he did the town a disservice when he spoke of 'cinematically deprived students'. The university film society, which is open to the public, shows up to five films a week and provides discussions and speakers: 'cinematically deprived' indeed!

Yours faithfully,

M. B. PHOENIX

President

Oxford University Film Society.

The Man Who Would be King

SIR,—Without going into arguments about the views expressed by your critic regarding *The Man Who Would Be King* (SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1976), I would only like to point out that both the critic, Mr. Geoff Brown, and the maker, Mr. John Huston, are completely ignorant about the subject on which they were making a film or writing the criticism.

In Kafiristan, the Lama style, clean shaved head, priests are totally alien and non-existing even today. The language spoken is neither Urdu nor Persian. They

have their own language which has no similarity with either of the two. In the film Mr. Saeed Jaffrey, the interpreter, talks to the locals in Urdu whereas they speak of different language and sometimes they are also heard speaking Persian or Urdu which is ridiculous, and at times the language he has used is totally obnoxious. Furthermore, the critic Mr. Geoff Brown must know that Kafiristan these days is part of Pakistan and not of Afghanistan.

Yours faithfully,

NAQI MUSTAFA

National Film Development
Corporation Ltd., Rawalpindi.

Renée Adorée

SIR,—During the course of my research on the life and career of the late silent actress Renée Adorée (1898-1933), I have been trying to locate individuals who knew her personally who would be willing to share their recollections about her with me. I would welcome correspondence with any of your readers who can offer any information or who share an interest in the late star of *The Big Parade* (1925) fame. Does anyone know whatever became of her sister Mira, or her brother (who had lived in London)? At the time of Renée's death, her mother Victoria had been living in Brixton; perhaps someone can tell me when and where she died.

Yours faithfully,

RANDY B. COHEN

451 West Lake Dasha Drive,
Plantation,
Florida 33324.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

COLUMBIA-WARNER for *The Late Show*, *Funny Girl*, *A Star is Born* (Garland), *A Star is Born* (Streisand).

CIC for *Demon Seed*, photograph of Alfred Hitchcock.

20TH CENTURY-FOX for *Hello Dolly*.

EMI for *King Kong*, *Apocalypse Now*.

UNITED ARTISTS for *Rocky*, photograph of Milos Forman.

CONTEMPORARY FILMS for *Rekava*, *Gamperaliya*, *Ransalu*, *King Lear*.

GALA FILM DISTRIBUTORS for *Mr. Klein*.

SCOTIA-BARBER for *The God King*.

ARTIFICIAL EYE for *Une Partie de Plaisir*.

THE OTHER CINEMA for *La Cecilia*.

THE OTHER CINEMA/BFI

PRODUCTION BOARD for *Riddles of the Sphinx*.

HEMDALE INTERNATIONAL for *Twilight's Last Gleaming*.

CINEMA-AUDITEL for *Le Camion*.

ACTION FILMS for *Providence*.

CINE-TAMARIS for *L'Une chante, l'autre pas*.

GREENWICH FILM PRODUCTION for *Cet obscur objet du désir*.

SUNCHILD PRODUCTIONS for *Le Diable Probablement*.

FILM VERLAG DER AUTOREN for *The American Friend*.

CITEL/ACTION FILMS for *La Dentellière*.

ELIAS QUEREJETA for *Elisa vida mia*.

CINEMA S.R.L./RAI for *Padre Padrone*.

ANGELOPOULOS PRODUCTIONS for *The Huntsmen*.

LIMELIGHT PROD. PTY. for *The Picture Show Man*.

GUO for *The F. J. Holden*.

CINEMAS LTD (Sri Lanka) for *Sandesaya*.

CEYLON STUDIOS for *Nidhanaya*.

SB (INTERNATIONAL) PHOTOGRAPHS/LENFILM/FOX for photograph of George Cukor.

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CENTRAL PRESS PHOTOS for photographs of Sir John Simon and Joseph Kennedy.

RADIO TIMES HULTON PICTURE LIBRARY for photograph of Henry Wickham Steed.

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PRINTED BY The Whitefriars Press Ltd., London and Tonbridge, England.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES (4 issues) £2.90 including postage.

Back issues 60p plus 18p postage.

U.S.A. \$8.00. Price per copy in United States \$2.00. Back issues \$2.50. Binders to hold two years' issues £2.10 (\$5.00).

SOLE AGENTS FOR U.S.A.: Eastern News Distributors, 111 Eighth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10011.

PUBLICATION DATES: 1st January, 1st April, 1st July, and 1st October.

Film Guide

*ABOVE US THE EARTH (BFI)

Director Karl Francis, a miner's son, juxtaposes live scenes from the closure of a Welsh colliery with fictional moments from the last days of an elderly miner. Though justly committed to the dispossessed miners, the film wastes its opportunities by retreating from argument into emotional special pleading. (Windsor Rees, Gwen Francis.)

ALEX & THE GYPSY (Fox)

An odd film from the unpredictable John Korty, with Jack Lemmon giving a distressingly one-note performance as the bail-bondsman Alex, and Geneviève Bujold as the gypsy who causes him to abandon the few principles he has left. Some incidental pleasures, but the atmosphere wavers unappealingly between sentimentality and brutish cynicism. (James Woods.)

BOUND FOR GLORY (United Artists)

David Carradine's Woody Guthrie smilingly sidesteps any attempt to get to the heart of this beguilingly elusive folk-singer. Hal Ashby's loose, atmospheric direction is enhanced by Haskell Wexler's striking photography of Texas in the Depression. Curiously offhand use of Guthrie's songs. (Melinda Dillon, Ronny Cox.)

BRIDGE TOO FAR, A (United Artists)

European and American stars re-fight the Battle of Arnhem for nearly three laborious hours. Director Richard Attenborough ponderously rams home the point that large military operations are costly, messy and frequently catastrophic affairs and that war brings out the best in men. (Dirk Bogarde, Sean Connery, Michael Caine, Gene Hackman, Robert Redford.)

CASSANDRA CROSSING, THE (Fox)

A virtual anthology of movie disasters, compounding the basic *Ship of Fools* format with international terrorist victims and power politics. The plot makes no sense; the characters make as much as they ever have. (Richard Harris, Burt Lancaster, Ava Gardner, Martin Sheen; director, George Pan Cosmatos.)

**DEVIL'S WIDOW, THE (NTA)

Shot in 1969 and originally titled *Tam Lin*, Roddy McDowall's first film as director is a genuinely off-beat horror, based on the Burns ballad, with Ava Gardner as the ageing lady who holds young men in thrall, sacrificing them when romance palls. Erratically arty at first, but acquiring both assurance and subtlety. (Ian McShane, Stephanie Beacham.)

**FUN WITH DICK AND JANE (Columbia-Warner)

Ted Kotcheff's satire on America's affluent society has more charm than bite; but a lively, cynical script and witty performances from Jane Fonda and George Segal, as a nuclear couple reduced to armed robbery to make ends meet, manage to inflict a few flesh wounds on the American Dream.

***GANG, LE (Columbia-Warner)**
Sub-Melville celebration of criminal camaraderie, with a curly-mopped Alain Delon leading a charmless quintet of Gallic villains in a spot of gendarme-baiting in post-Vichy France and standing back for applause; proving only that Jacques Deray, like Delon, appears to be going soft. (Maurice Barrier, Roland Bertin.)

*GATEKEEPER'S DAUGHTER, THE (Cinecenta)

Appearances suggest another inert slab of porn; in fact it's a loving burlesque of silent movie traditions with title cards, ham acting and theatrical backdrops. The devisers are Jérôme Savary of Le Grand Magic Circus and surrealist artist Roland Topor; members of Savary's troupe provide the cast, though their customary flamboyance is held back. For collectors of curios.

*HELTER SKELTER (Hemdale)

Deliberately avoiding the sensational elements of the Tate-LaBianca murders, Tom Gries' last film leads us carefully through chief prosecutor Vincent Bugliosi's sometimes ponderous account of the Manson trial. Manson, as played by Steve Railsback, broods silently throughout; his motives and his madness remain a potent mystery.

**ILLUSTRIOUS CORPSES (Cinegate)

A visually compelling study in political conspiracy and urban paranoia. When Francesco Rosi uses faces and places to imply the spread of some irresistible disease, his case is overwhelming; when he attempts to substantiate it with more realistic detail, conviction falters. (Lino Ventura, Max von Sydow, Fernando Rey, Alain Cuny.)

**IMMORAL TALES (New Realm)

Walerian Borowczyk's compendium of erotic tales ranges freely across the centuries and across the director's styles, from sprightly ritualistic (the first story) to wearily lampooning (the last). But even when his stories let him down, Borowczyk's eye for detail and design keeps them in place. (Fabrice Luchini, Charlotte Alexandra, Paloma Picasso, Florence Bellamy.) *Reviewed.*

**IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER (The Other Cinema)

Belated appearance of Bellocchio's brilliantly eccentric 1971 account of revolutionary stirrings in a Jesuit school for boys. Galvanically funny about the boredom, humiliations and ubiquitous fetichisms, but also exact in its analysis of the realities of power. (Yves Beneyton, Lou Castel.)

ISLANDS IN THE STREAM (CIC)

Handsomely mounted, well cast, and with even a touch of grandeur about its representation of Hemingway's Gulf Stream paradise, this adaptation never overcomes the structural flaws of the author's last novel. Personal and political themes, action and sentiment drift apart—until they are bundled together in a painfully arch death scene. (George C. Scott, David Hemmings, Claire Bloom; director, Franklin J. Schaffner.)

*JACKSON COUNTY JAIL (United Artists)

A formula road movie plot crossed with a Women's Lib sub-theme and scripted with all the signposts neatly in place. But Michael Miller directs with considerable confidence and panache, and Yvette Mimieux makes convincing work of the heroine's mounting disasters. (Severn Darden, Tommy Lee Jones.)

**KAADU (Contemporary)

First film by Girish Karnad, a writer turned actor and now

director in the Satyajit Ray mould: a quietly perceptive and richly detailed study, seen through the eyes of a child, of the ferociously escalating feud provoked between two villages by the encroachments of progress. (Amarish Puri, G. S. Nataraj.)

*LOST HONOUR OF KATHARINA BLUM, THE (Contemporary)

Overpitched adaptation of Heinrich Böll's novel about a woman hounded by the police and the yellow press for harbouring a criminal. Streamlined direction from Volker Schlöndorff and Margarethe von Trotta misses the subtler ironies of the original. (Angela Winkler, Mario Adorf, Dieter Laser.)

*MAN ON THE ROOF, THE (Cinecoeur)

Sniper on the Stockholm rooftops, seeking revenge for police brutalities. Fine opening sequence (borrowed from *Le Samourai*), striking location work and excellent performances, but the routine of police work seems unduly routine. (Carl Gustaf Lindstedt; director, Bo Widerberg.)

**MEAT (The Other Cinema)

Frederick Wiseman's cool, close look at how sheep and cattle are processed into chops and hamburgers at a Colorado packing plant. Virtuoso editing, with the production line slaughterhouse sequences providing an icily eloquent commentary on the mechanics of human consumption.

**MR. KLEIN (Gala)

Joseph Losey keeps the usual paraphernalia of Occupation movies well in reserve in this brilliantly allusive account of how a ruthless exploiter of human misery finds himself cast—through the offices of his Jewish namesake and *doppelgänger*—in the drama. The style is sharp and clear, until the picture begins to darken with the encroaching nightmare. (Alain Delon, Jeanne Moreau, Juliet Berto.) *Reviewed.*

**PASTORAL HIDE AND SEEK (Essential)

Bizarre surrealist exercise by Shuji Terayama, hazily but beguilingly perambulating the area of the mind where childhood memory intersects with present reality. Odd touches of Fellini in a dreamlike Japanese landscape peopled by circus freaks and symbolic clocks. (Kantaro Sugo, Hiroyuki Tanaka, Chigusa Takayama.)

PRINCE AND THE PAUPER, THE (Fox)

Mark Twain's tale has been expanded upon to the tune of 8 million dollars and an all-star cast. The result is a dull trip to reach a small moral about remaining true to yourself. Filling both title roles, Mark Lester is less than versatile. (Oliver Reed, Raquel Welch, Charlton Heston, Rex Harrison; director, Richard Fleischer.)

*RAFFERTY AND THE GOLD DUST TWINS (Columbia-Warner)

Dick Richards' second feature, made to seem more jejune perhaps by its late appearance here, is an eccentric road movie that dawdles along with three woe-begone drop-outs, but never shakes off the clichés sufficiently to make the trip worthwhile. (Alan Arkin, Sally Kellerman, Mackenzie Phillips.) *Reviewed.*

**ROCKY (United Artists)

Wonderfully weird and witty account of a moronic boxer's heroic fight to earn the glory thrust upon him for publicity purposes; though Capra-esque in his intimation that even a bum has greatness within him, Rocky is transformed into a *pierrôt lunaire*

wandering the Philadelphian moonscape by the remarkable dialogue and camerawork. (Sylvester Stallone, Talia Shire; director, John G. Avildsen.) *Reviewed.*

**SECTION SPECIALE (Curzon)

The functionaries of a court (the 'Section Spéciale') in Occupied France convince themselves that the Nazis will be appeased by the re-sentencing of a group of convicted men. Costa-Gavras dispassionately sets out the mechanics of self-delusion, this time without overtly identifying with the victims of political tyranny. (Michel Lonsdale, Louis Seigner.)

SENTINEL, THE (CIC)

Michael Winner dabbles in the demonic; and makes a not particularly subtle genre even more visually and thematically explicit. The story is a job lot, but the crudities (including zoom and distorting lenses, and a climactic trip into Hell) are all Winner's own. (Cristina Raines, Burgess Meredith, Ava Gardner, Eli Wallach.)

**SWEET AWAY... (GTO)

An odd couple, marooned on a deserted Mediterranean island, lustily fight a sexual battle in the class war. Lina Wertmüller's quirkily original film ends in tragi-comedy as the bourgeois shrew (Mariangela Melato) and the representative of Sicilian machismo (Giancarlo Giannini) call a halt to hostilities only then to be rescued from their false paradise.

**TWILIGHT'S LAST GLEAMING (Hemdale)

Despite extensive distributor cuts that wreck the balance of ambivalence, a remarkable thriller about another *Strangelove* doomsday, directed with the full force of Aldrich's attack as an indictment of political strategies and the nuclear frighteners game. (Burt Lancaster, Paul Winfield, Richard Widmark.) *Reviewed.*

**VIOLONS DU BAL, LES (Contemporary)

Director Michel Drach reconstructs his own childhood in Occupied France with the help of his wife, Marie-José Nat, and their winning son David; the result lacks the bite of *Lacombe Lucien* and occasionally falls into the trap of that film's empty image making. But a vein of identifiable, felt emotion suffuses the whole. (Jean-Louis Trintignant.)

**WATCHMAKER OF SAINT-PAUL, THE (Contemporary)

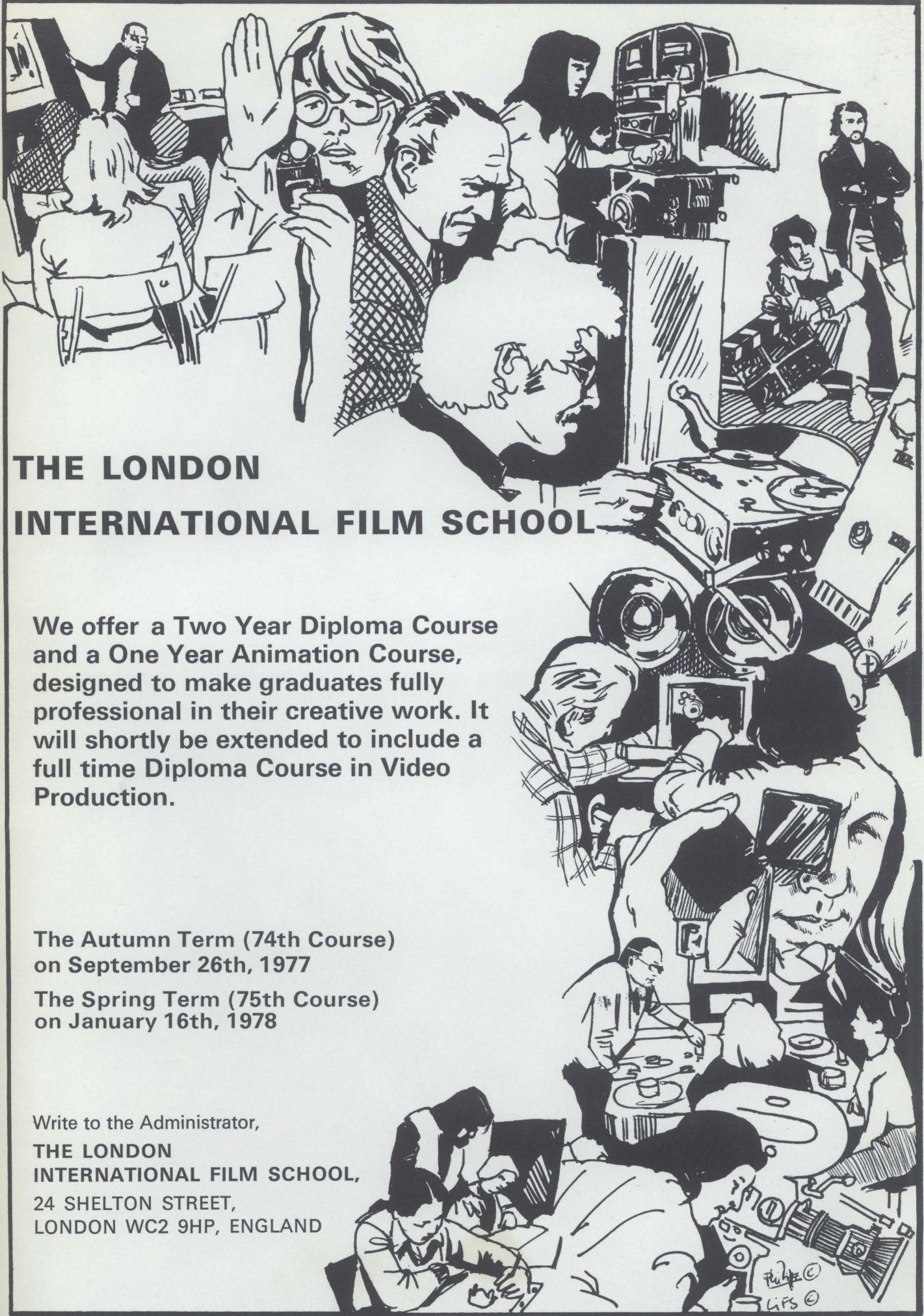
Solid, unashamedly Old Wave adaptation of a Simenon novel, about a murder annexed as party political fodder during election time. Admirable use of locations in Lyon; outstanding performances by Philippe Noiret and Jean Rochefort. (Director, Bertrand Tavernier.)

**WOULD YOU KILL A CHILD (Crawford)

Midwich cuckoo Spanish-style, with malevolent youngsters killing every adult in sight in revenge for past sins against the children of the world. After a miscalculated opening, Narciso Serrador fashions some genuine shocks and marshals the escalating horrors with pleasing economy. (Lewi Fiander, Prunella Ransome.)

ZOLTAN... HOUND OF DRACULA (EMI)

Routine, but not wholly unenjoyable throat-biting yarn which has a resurrected hound trying to get his teeth into the last of the Dracula clan (Michael Pataki), who lives in present-day Los Angeles in blissful ignorance of his ancestry. (Reggie Nalder, José Ferrer; director, Albert Band.)



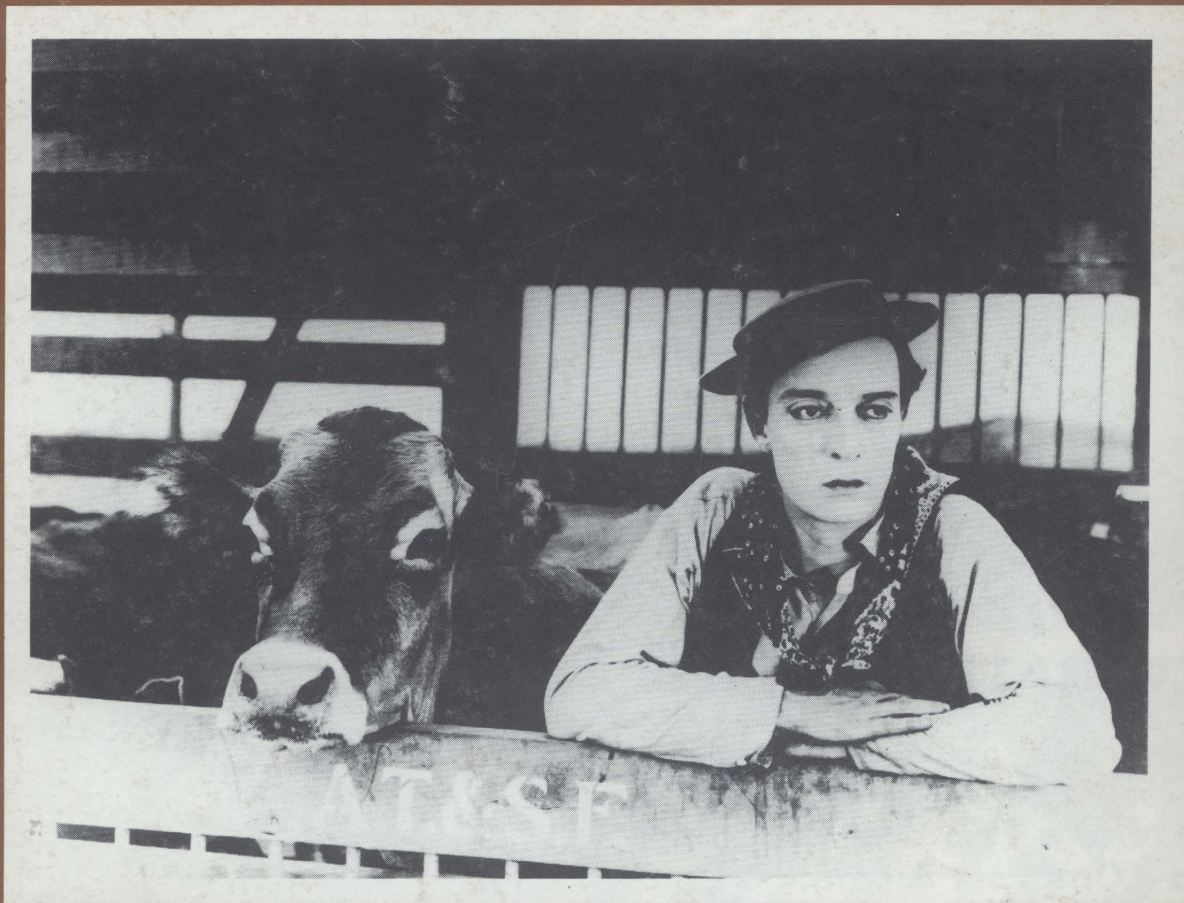
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